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THE BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE
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The ROUT of the RACKET

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Watch for the

JANUARY BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

The McCall Company, Publisher, 230 Park Avenue, New York

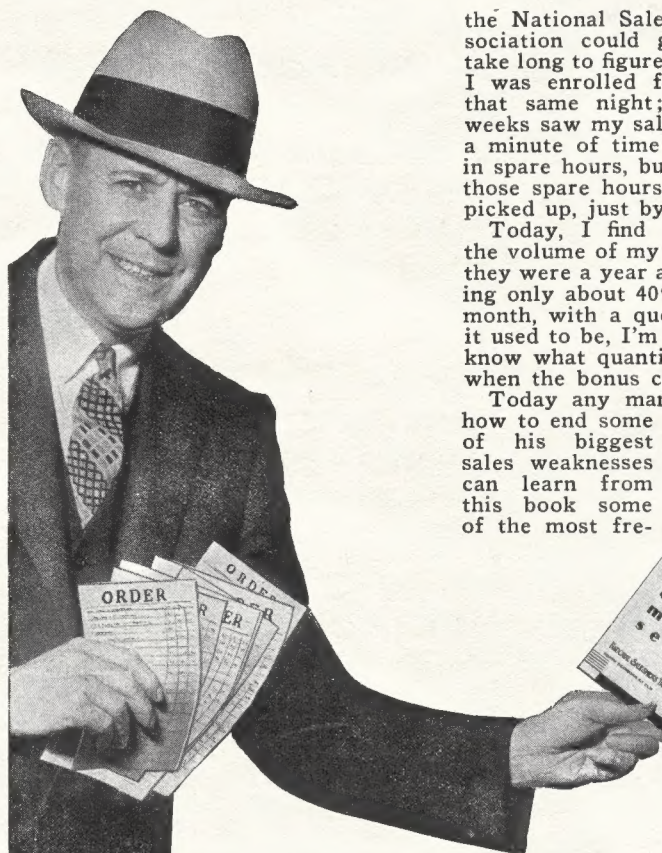
"I Saved Six Orders and Made \$90 in One Day... Thanks to This Pocket Volume!"

I'VE only been selling about a year. When I broke in, though I realized that trained salesmen are the highest paid men in the world, I expected the going to be hard at first. It was—a lot harder than I'd expected, even. At the end of six months I was commencing to get discouraged. I certainly hadn't made a flop of it—but I wasn't getting the results I should have had.

Naturally, seeing other fellows who started right with me go right ahead, I realized something was wrong. A particularly disheartening thing was the fact that at times I'd be right on the point of closing a good-sized order—and all of a sudden, it would go "flop." In fact, it kept happening all the time. I was doing something, I knew, that was killing those sales.

Finally I decided that I had to do something. I had been hearing a lot about National Salesmen's Training Association. But I'd never investigated them. Then, one day, I read one of their announcements. I was amazed to find how comprehensively they covered the training of salesmen. Furthermore, they announced that they were sending a most unusual volume, "The Key to Master Salesmanship" to ambitious men who asked for it—not only experienced salesmen, but men who had never sold, but wanted a chance in this highly paid field.

Naturally, I wrote for it—it seemed to me that here was the certain solution to the errors I had been making. Imagine my surprise—and interest—when there arrived, not only one book, but two. To this day I can't decide which of those books helped me most. The little book which I had not been expecting was just what I needed at the time. It was written for men just like me—men who had been plugging along in salesmanship—never successful, never so hopeless that they quit selling. And while "The Key to Master Salesmanship" gave me an insight into the real secrets of salesmanship, the other book, "Mistakes Commonly Made in Selling" was the one I could



first get practical use from.

Right in the first few pages, I saw some examples quoted. They were things I had been doing every day. I'd never dreamed they were dangerous errors. The more I thought about them, the more clear it became, though, why I was having such difficulty with my closes. I thought to myself: "By golly, that's why Barnes decided to put off buying, this very afternoon!" I kept on thinking of men whose orders I had lost, through just that very mistake. There were six of them.

The next morning, I sallied out, bright and early to see if I couldn't save those sales, using the tips given me. Before noon, I had put the practical suggestions of that little book to work—and sure enough, in every case, I made the sale which I had thought was gone glimmering. Six sales saved—at \$15 commission apiece, that was \$90 made, by one morning's work, plus the advice of a little book that cost me nothing!

Of course, that set me to thinking. If that one piece of knowledge could make me \$90, how much would I make out of having all the knowledge which

the National Salesmen's Training Association could give me? It didn't take long to figure that one out, either! I was enrolled for the full training that same night; and the next two weeks saw my sales record soar. Not a minute of time lost—I studied just in spare hours, but I learned things in those spare hours that I'd never have picked up, just by my own experience.

Today, I find amazing increase in the volume of my sales now over what they were a year ago. Then I was selling only about 40% of my quota—this month, with a quota twice as high as it used to be, I'm 50% over! And you know what quantity production means when the bonus checks roll around!

Today any man who wants to see how to end some of his biggest sales weaknesses can learn from this book some of the most fre-

quent mistakes which spoil sales, and get practical suggestions how to end them. Not a penny of obligation—"Mistakes Commonly Made in Selling" is now FREE to any ambitious man. At the same time we will send you, also free, the new and finer edition of "The Key to Master Salesmanship," which since its publication has been read by many men who have got into the biggest pay class of salesmanship. Write for both these valuable volumes now—the coupon will bring them by return mail.

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The BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE

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JAMES EDWIN
BAUM

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"THE BLACK
STONE OF
TIBESTI"

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COMBAT is a law of life.

The most primitive people have to fight for existence, and the only struggles which are still more savage and merciless are those which mark the battles in the streets of our greatest civilized cities today.

Single combat—the fight of man against man, to the death of one or of both—not only survives, but has increased in its spectacular significance. Even in the Great War, which arrayed men by the millions against each other, and in which the casualty list of a single attack would exceed the muster-rolls of many an ancient army, single combat played a prominent and perhaps decisive part.

It was a matter of man against man in the sky, miles above the battle-field, which often in very truth gave victory to one or the other of the armies of millions of men below.

Control of the air preceded, upon an evenly fought front, the control of the ground, and it was the duels of the flyers which decided possession of the sky.

BLUE BOOK brings you, in its stories and in its Real Experiences, the thrill and fascination of combat—of man meeting man on the frontier, or on the city street, or in the sky, when the stake is life and fortune.

Combat takes other fascinating forms, of course; indeed many of the duels which most thrill us are with weapons more subtle and yet no less decisive—except that they spare life—than the pistol or the machine-gun. BLUE BOOK brings you these stories too, in the matching of wits of men, as in the “Free Lances in Diplomacy.” Ewing Walker brings a combat of wills in a gripping story in next month’s BLUE BOOK.

And, as always, there will be plenty of those actual

combats. Seven Anderton takes you along with his two-fisted hero into those dark and dangerous sections of port towns; Lemuel de Bra to a forsaken hole on the Border where the law is settled man to man; Roy Norton to the windswept ranges where men carry their lives in their holsters; Albert Payson Terhune to the prize-ring with two unusual characters, whose clash is of wills and of blows; and Edgar Rice Burroughs and Raymond S. Spears to those picturesque localities where man is a natural animal and settles his conflicts like his primitive ancestors.

In “Pirates of the Frozen Seas,” BLUE BOOK is offering a true adventure series. These realistic accounts of the grim Arctic land are filled with all types of combat.

We believe that every man feels at times the urge to settle his disputes in single combat. Civilization changes, but human nature remains the same. Laws are made, but men find an outlet for a law of life. In the flower of Greek culture, men slugged at each other’s stripped bodies with the *cesti*, an iron gauntlet. Today they slug in a squared ring. In our old South they fought duels. Today they ignore the formalities and use blunt-nosed automatics. Responsibilities or circumstances may prevent many from satisfying that urge. But you can experience in your imagination the thrill of combat, wherever it is fought, through the communications of BLUE BOOK writers.

—THE EDITOR.

The Rout of the Racket

*A fascinating story of the underworld and its overlords
by the able citizen who gave us "Six Bombs," "Three Who
Would Hang," and "The Racket Wrecker."*

By SEVEN ANDERTON

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

"AND may God have mercy on your soul!" There was tense silence in the big somber courtroom as the words died away. Judge Gaylord had pronounced the death-sentence on William S. Hayden, better known as "Velvet Bill," a notorious lord of the underworld.

A bitterly fought legal battle for the life of Velvet Bill had ended with victory for the State, after two years during which justice had been obstructed in every conceivable manner by the clever criminal lawyers employed as counsel to the notorious prisoner.

Velvet Bill stood before the bench, looking up at the judge who had just doomed him to die in the electric chair during the week of May second. A smile that was half sneer twisted the prisoner's face.

"Aint you funny?" spat Velvet Bill. "*You sentence me to burn! Who in hell do you think you are? I'll bet you a hundred grand against ten that I never sit on the hot spot. Got any sporting blood?*"

The only answer from the judge was a motion with his hand. The officers standing on either side of the prisoner took his arms and started to lead him toward the iron door of the corridor leading to the cells.

"Just a minute, please," another voice cut through the silence. "I'd like to take that bet, if the court will allow me to arrange with the prisoner to put up the money." The speaker was a tall, gray-haired man who had risen to his feet near the rear of the courtroom. He was Marshall Bradford, owner and editor of the morning *Planet*.

A buzz of excitement rose in the big room. The officers with their prisoner hesitated in their march.

"Order in the court," snapped the judge. "Mr. Bradford, I believe the way to transact any business with the prisoner is through his attorneys. Officers, remove the prisoner."

"You're on, Bradford," called Velvet Bill to the editor as his escort began to urge him toward the iron door. "See my lawyers!"

"Silence!" roared the judge. "Order in the court!"

"Go jump off a bridge," called Velvet Bill as the officers dragged him hastily into the corridor and slammed the grim portal shut.

"This court is adjourned until tomorrow morning at ten o'clock," declared Judge Gaylord.

The nondescript crowd rose and filed out. Before noon the story of the gruesome bet was all over the city.

LATE in the evening of the same day two men sat in conference before a log fire in the library of a house in a quiet residential section of the city. One—the owner of the house—was Paul Keene, recognized as one of the

world's greatest detectives. He was a tall, gaunt man of middle age, careless of his dress and quiet of manner.

The second man was a youngster in his late twenties. His name was John Garth; he was the son and sole heir of the late Peter Garth, millionaire broker. Young Garth was a stalwart chap, handsome in a rough, thoroughly masculine way. Since boyhood he had been a steadfast admirer of Paul Keene and with maturity had volunteered as understudy to the great detective. In this capacity he had been of considerable help to Keene on numerous cases.

"Judge Gaylord sentenced Velvet Bill Hayden this afternoon," said Garth. "Death in the electric chair during the week of May second."

"Yes," nodded Keene, frowning into the fire; "and I wish the job were done now."

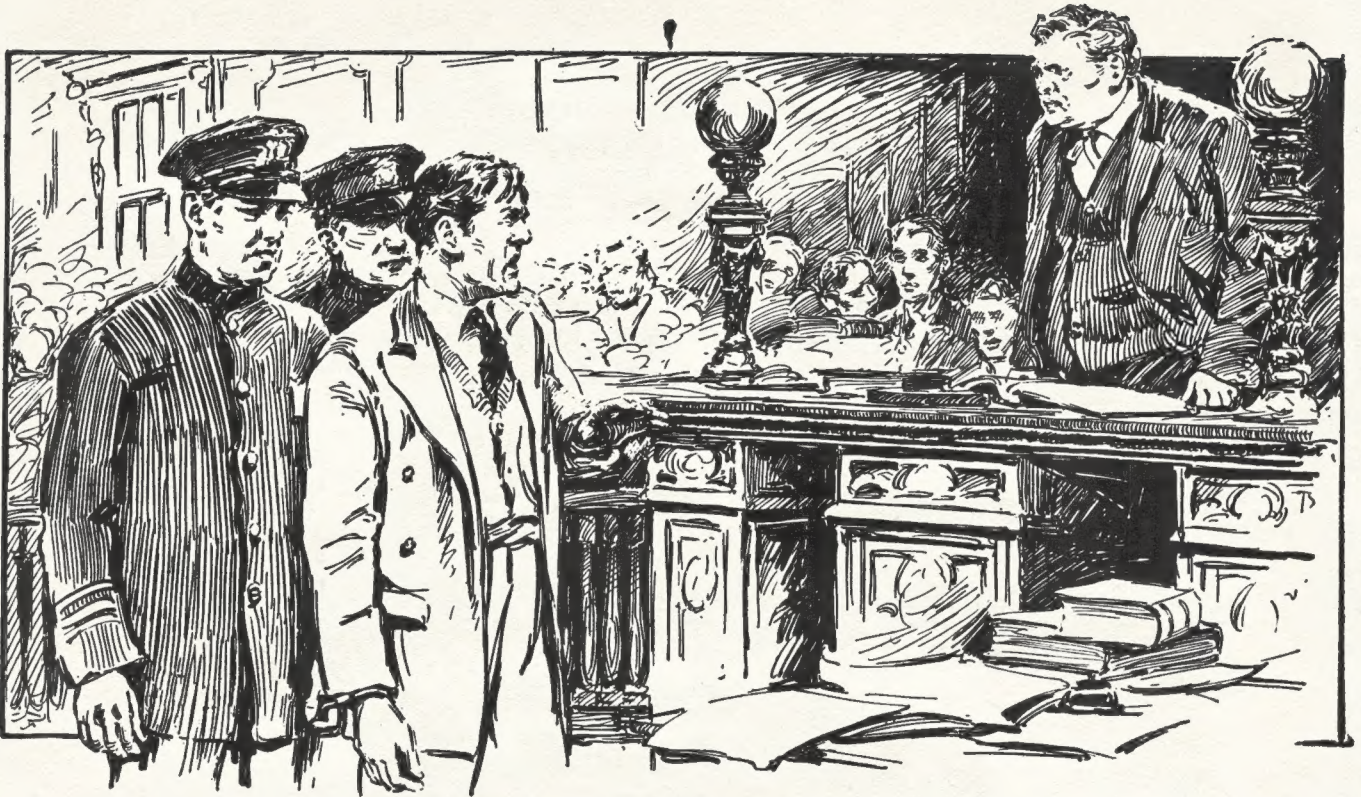
"Why?" inquired Garth.

"Because of a lot of things," answered Keene. "Hayden is the first of the really big fish in the crime puddle that the present administration has brought to justice. It has taken two years of bitter legal battle to start him toward the death-house. As you know, it has been the boast of the underworld that Velvet Bill would never be convicted. Nevertheless, he has been convicted—and sentenced to death. That far we have progressed, in spite of the fact that the best legal talent his money could engage has fought doggedly every step of the way.

"But the battle is not over yet. For the past few days, word has been passed about the underworld that Hayden will never be executed. Something is in the wind—and it is not good."

"I fail to see how anything can prevent his execution now," said Garth slowly. "His final appeal has proven vain. Clemency can now come from only one source, Governor Manning. Manning will not interfere, surely?"

"No," agreed Paul Keene. "The Governor will not do anything to delay or prevent the execution. He is too well aware that the future of his party depends upon Velvet Bill's death in the chair. That is the turning-point. If Hayden, and the powerful ring to which he belongs, manage to cheat the law and save his life, all the years of effort on the part of the Governor's party to break the stranglehold of organized crime and vice on this city and State have been wasted. If Hayden dies, victory is with the decent people and faith in and respect for the law will have been restored. If Hayden is not executed, the underworld will be triumphant. Gang-rule will be thrust upon the city more ruthlessly than ever and the Governor and all other decent men in this fight will be swept into oblivion. That is why I would feel much easier if Hayden were already dead."



"You sentence me to burn?" spat Velvet Bill. "I'll bet you a hundred grand against ten that I never sit on the hot spot!"

"I still—" began Garth, then halted his remark as the telephone clamored for attention.

Paul Keene rose and answered the call. When he turned from the instrument his face was grave and puzzled.

"That was Governor Manning," said the great detective. "He is coming over here at once. He has just received a telephone-call at his town house from a man who refused to reveal his identity. The party demanded that the Governor pardon Velvet Bill Hayden immediately."

"Did the Governor make any attempt to have the call traced?" asked Garth.

"He did have it traced," answered Keene crisply. "It came from this telephone."

"From *your* telephone?" cried Garth. "Impossible!"

"So it would seem," nodded Keene. "You and I have been sitting here beside the instrument for the past three hours. We know that it has not been used. Nevertheless, an accurate check at the exchange proves that the Governor's call did come from this telephone—more proof that I was correct when I said there was trouble in the wind."

THERE was a harassed look on the face of Governor Carter Manning when he entered the library where Keene and Garth were waiting. The Governor was a gray-haired man of slight build, and moved in the quick nervous manner so often seen in men of his type.

"Mr. Keene," said the Governor when he had taken a chair, "I am all on edge over this thing. The man who called me just before I called you said that he was a friend of this man Hayden. He informed me that he and others mean to see to it that Hayden is not executed. He said that unless I had pardoned Hayden or commuted his sentence to life-imprisonment before tomorrow night, he and his friends would be forced to take drastic action."

"What did you say to him?" inquired Keene.

"I told him that on no condition would I interfere with the course of justice in Hayden's case."

"And then?"

"He said that that was my own hard luck. Then he hung up his telephone."

"And you had the call traced immediately?"

"Yes—and was told it had come from your telephone."

"That must be looked into at once," nodded Keene. "In the—"

The jangle of the telephone cut off the detective's speech. Keene rose and answered.

"Hello," said a gruff voice. "Is this Paul Keene?"

"Yes," answered the detective.

"We know that the Governor is with you," continued the voice. "We want to tell you what we told him a short time ago. We do not intend to permit the execution of Velvet Bill Hayden. We will prevent it in spite of hell! The easiest way out will be for the Governor to pardon him before tomorrow night. If he doesn't, he will wish he had."

"Who are you?" demanded Keene.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" replied the voice. "I am just one of Hayden's friends. There are a lot of us—and we mean business. Just deliver my message to the Governor and tell him that we will wait until tomorrow night for him to pardon Hayden. Then we will do other things, if necessary."

There was a click as the connection was severed. Keene jiggled the hook and muttered an exasperated curse. For several minutes the detective tried frantically to recall the operator in order to trace the call, but his efforts were vain.

"That was the same chap who called you awhile ago," snapped Keene as he hung up the receiver and faced the Governor. "It is easy now to figure out what happened. Our friend tapped my telephone-wire not far from this house. Then he called you. After that, he waited and saw you arrive at my home. Then he went back to his connected testing outfit and called me. When he had finished talking to me, he cut the wire, leaving my telephone dead."

Keene went on to tell the Governor and Garth what had passed between him and the anonymous caller.

"This situation seems impossible," said the Governor, when Keene had finished.

"It is damnably real," answered Keene. "We are facing a battle with a desperate and unscrupulous gang. It is a battle to the death—to decide whether law as laid down

by organized society or gang-rule as laid down by organized crime shall hold sway in this city."

"What shall we do? What can we do?" cried Manning.

"Execute Hayden," answered Keene calmly. "If we succeed in that, we win. If we fail, they win."

"What can prevent his execution?" demanded the Governor. "I will not pardon him—you know that."

"I know that you'll not pardon him," replied Keene. "What else can happen remains to be seen. We must not forget that we are dealing with desperate, ruthless and powerful men."

"What precautions have been taken against a jail-break?" asked John Garth, who had been listening in silence.

"All that are possible, I believe," answered Governor Manning.

"Yes," nodded Paul Keene. "I think we can be certain that Hayden will not escape or be rescued either from jail or after he is taken to the State Prison on the day after tomorrow."

"There's the weak spot," cried Garth. "He might be rescued in transit!"

"That's it!" exclaimed Keene. "That's why they have given the Governor until tomorrow night to pardon Hayden. In case the pardon is not forthcoming, they intend to rescue Velvet Bill from his guard on the trip up the river."

"I believe you are right," cried Governor Manning. "What can be done to prevent such a possibility?"

"Something *must* be done," answered Keene, "and done quickly. We must get all the officials concerned together, and form a plan. My telephone is out of commission, but my car is at the curb. Come on."

IN the gray dawn of a certain Wednesday, a grim and warlike procession moved northward out of the city. Never had a condemned man had so impressive an escort as that which accompanied Velvet Bill Hayden on his journey to the prison up the river where he was to pay with his life for the murder of a fellow-gangster.

Leading the caravan were six open cars, loaded with heavily armed and keenly alert National Guardsmen. Next came an armored car carrying uniformed officers who manned the machine-guns with which the portholes of the vehicle bristled. Behind this battleship of the highways rolled another armored car in which rode Velvet Bill Hayden, his wrists manacled to the wrists of brawny guards who sat on either side of their prisoner. Hayden's private car was followed by another armored one and ten more open cars in which rode the rest of the company of National Guard. It was evident the State intended there should be no slip in the delivery of Velvet Bill to his last quarters on earth.

The procession had covered about half of the distance to its destination when the expected trouble came. It swooped with the speed of bad news, from the sky.

Three trim and swift planes, flying in single file, darted into view. All three were painted a solid sky-blue and bore no identifying marks or numbers. Like three blue falcons striking at a flock of quail, the planes bore down on the train of cars. Lower and lower they swooped as they neared their prey.

The soldiers in the open car were first to sight the enemy and become aware of the danger. Rifles were thrust outward and upward and steel-jacketed bullets sped into the air to spatter harmlessly on the armored bottoms of the blue planes. Swiftly the low-flying planes passed along the line of cars and each released a score of bombs in rapid succession.

They were strange bombs. There were no explosions

when they struck. The glass of which they were made simply burst to release the tear-gas contained within. In a moment the villainous gas had enveloped the train of cars and halted it in demoralized confusion. Gasping and blinded drivers jammed on brakes and brought their cars to an abrupt standstill. Soldiers and officers dropped their weapons and clapped hands to their streaming eyes as they gasped for breath amid the torturing fumes. The three blue planes sped away to the southward.

AS the first whiff of the tear-gas entered the armored car where Velvet Bill sat between his guards, the prisoner's face wrinkled in a triumphant grin.

"Well, good-by, boys," chuckled Hayden, as the first tears trickled down his cheeks. "Sorry to hurry off, but I have business elsewhere."

The heavy car lurched as the suddenly blinded driver brought it to a halt. Officer Tom Brady, sitting on Hayden's right, glared with fierce determination through his tears and struck out viciously with his hamlike right fist. That fist collided with the prisoner's jaw and Velvet Bill slumped in his seat like an ox felled by the butcher.

"Tear-gas!" gasped Brady to his mate. "Get your keys and unlock yourself from him, quick!"

A moment later the two burly officers, groping their way by sense of touch, emerged from the car and dragged the form of Velvet Bill Hayden after them. Working swiftly, they hauled the prisoner to the back of the armored truck. Quickly they handcuffed the struggling captive to the rear axle of the heavy vehicle, and Officer Brady grinned, despite his tears, as he flung the handcuff keys from him with all his strength.

"They'll have a hell of a time getting him loose from there!" gasped Brady.

Down the highway from the north came six powerful cars, loaded with armed men wearing gas masks. Gangland was speeding to the rescue! Swiftly the big cars bore down upon the helpless train. They skidded to a stop and a score of men, grotesque in gas masks, leaped out and dashed in among the blinded defenders of the halted caravan. Soon several of the would-be rescuers found Velvet Bill, only to face a new problem. The quick thinking and acting of Officer Brady had produced a condition upon which they had not planned.

To further defeat them, the tear gas was rapidly dissipating in the open air and a slight breeze was speeding relief to the blinded men. The frantic efforts of the gangsters to loosen Velvet Bill from his mooring to the axle of the ponderous vehicle were vain.

An officer who had begun to regain his vision rushed down upon the gangsters with drawn gun. He was felled by a blow over the head with a blackjack, but the gangsters recognized defeat. Two minutes later they were back in their cars, speeding to safety. Velvet Bill Hayden still lay behind the armored car, shackled securely to its axle. An hour later he was locked securely in a cell of the death-house at the State prison.

THAT evening Paul Keene was host to Governor Manning, Leonard Gale, warden of the State prison, and John Garth.

"Do you think you will be able to run down any of the men who were behind this morning's outrage, Keene?" asked Governor Manning, his eyes fixed anxiously on the face of the detective.

"I shall certainly try," answered Keene. "We are still ahead of them on points in this scrap. With the precautions that have been taken it would require a bigger army than they can muster to rescue Hayden from where he is now. In ten days Hayden will be executed. Perhaps in



"Go jump off the bridge!" called Velvet Bill as the officers dragged him into the corridor.

"I—I—do—not," said the Governor tensely, after a moment of electric silence. "Not now—or ever!"

Keene turned back to the instrument and repeated what the Governor had said.

"Tell the Governor," snapped the voice, "that he has just pronounced the same

less than that time we will have some others of his like behind the bars for this morning's work. Our principal task, however, is to carry out Hayden's execution as scheduled. After that the tide will be definitely with us, and against the crew that has ruled by fear in this town for so long."

"By thunder," growled Warden Gale, "I wish Hayden was executed and off my hands! Even with all the extra guards and the two companies of militia the Governor has put on the job, I'm not going to sleep any too well for the next ten nights."

"You'll have company in your wakefulness," observed the Governor. "I had another telephone-call from this gang this afternoon. The fellow on the wire told me that I am to be killed unless I pardon Hayden at once. That's not such a cheerful prospect."

"I'd say—" began Warden Gale, halting as the jingle of the telephone sounded.

Paul Keene went to the phone. Two minutes later he turned a white face toward the waiting men.

"Good God, men!" said the detective hoarsely. "They have kidnaped Judge Gaylord! The fellow on the wire said that unless the Governor pardons Hayden immediately, Judge Gaylord will be killed."

"It can't be possible!" gasped the Governor. "Telephone the judge's home. They must be bluffing."

"I'm afraid they're not," answered Keene, turning back to the phone. "The judge had received threatening letters before he sentenced Hayden. It is our fault not to have guarded against this."

Keene got the operator and gave her the number of the judge's home. A moment later the detective started as he heard the same voice that had spoken to him a few moments before.

"Hello, Keene," chuckled the voice. "We've been waiting for your call. Now that you have called, you may tell the Governor that we want his answer at once. Ask him if he will grant Hayden's pardon immediately."

"It's—them," said Keene turning toward the group in the library. "It seems they are at the Gaylord home. They want to know immediately whether you, Governor Manning, intend to pardon Hayden."

sentence on his friend Gaylord that Gaylord pronounced on Velvet Bill Hayden. The only difference is that *this* sentence will be carried out!"

There was the click of a severed connection. Keene turned back to his anxious-faced friends. He repeated the remark of the gangster.

"Good God, men," cried the Governor, leaping from his chair and facing them. "We must do something! We—"

"We must not lose our heads—whatever we do," interrupted Paul Keene. "Be calm, gentlemen, and let us take stock of this thing. I have said before that the situation was more serious than any of you gentlemen realized. It now appears that it is even more serious than I have realized. The battle is on—and I fear that the abduction and possible murder of Judge Gaylord is only the opening gun."

"You mean that there are men who will actually dare—" began the Governor.

"I mean that we are pitted against men who will dare anything to gain their ends," cut in Keene. "Gentlemen, try to realize that a monstrous thing has grown up in our city and country during the past ten years—a thing known as gang-rule, government by organized vice and crime in defiance of the laws made by our legislative bodies. This thing had grown to terrifying proportions before the party of which you, Governor Manning, are the head, was placed in power. The decent, honest people put your party in power in the belief that you would throttle this monster. The people have supported your party during four years of a battle in which little ground was gained.

"The first telling blow at the heart of the thing was struck when we were successful in convicting Velvet Bill Hayden and sentencing him to death. Hayden was one of the men higher up—one of the sacred inner circle of the hidden government. This morning the enemy struck in a desperate attempt to rescue him. They have sworn that he shall never be executed. It is terrible to think to what lengths they may go. Remember, they know fully as well as we do that this is a death-grapple. They—"

The telephone rang again. Keene answered to hear once more the familiar gruff voice.

"Look outside your front door," said the voice in answer to Keene's *hello*. Then the connection clicked off.

KEENE hung up the receiver, walked slowly across the room to the entrance-hall and opened the front door. The stream of light from the open portal disclosed the lifeless body of Judge Gaylord sprawled on the steps.

"Come here, gentlemen," called Keene as he knelt beside the body.

The group in the library came quickly, to stand stunned and grim-faced in the doorway.

"Judge Gaylord is quite dead," said Keene, rising. "Garth, please do the necessary telephoning at once. We must leave the body where it is until the coroner arrives."

Back in the library, after John Garth had telephoned the proper authorities, Paul Keene called the attention of the group to a typewritten note that had been pinned to the breast of Judge Gaylord's coat.

"Here is the Judge who sentenced Velvet Bill Hayden," Keene read. "He will sentence no more. We failed to rescue Hayden this morning—but unless he is pardoned and released at once you will all wish we had been successful. What is left of the Judge is the first sample of what we can and will do."

"God!" cried Governor Manning.

"You may have read Kipling's ballad, 'The Grave Of The Hundred Dead,'" Keene continued reading. "That grave will be nothing compared to the grave for a thousand dead that you will have to dig if Hayden is executed. If you doubt that we mean it, take another look at the messenger who delivered this note."

"Fiends!" cried Warden Gale.

"Read on," begged the Governor hoarsely.

"We will kill you people like flies, if we are forced to it," Keene read on. "We will not quit while there are enough police left to arrest anybody or enough judges to run a court. We will make it suicide to run for a public office. Think this over and then see that Hayden is pardoned quickly."

"It is not that we cannot go on without Hayden. It is the principle of the thing. It is that you must realize that we are, after all, more powerful than you, and that the important members of our organization must not be molested by you. There is no alternative. You are out in the open. We can strike in the dark—and strike hard. We shall expect the pardon of Hayden before tomorrow night."

Keene folded the note and thrust it into his coat pocket. The silence in the room was heavy.

"Was there no signature?" asked Governor Manning presently.

"Yes," answered Keene. "The note is signed as such wolves should sign a communication—'The Pack.'"

A rap at the door announced the arrival of the coroner and the police. The four men went to the door to answer necessary questions. When the body had been removed, the Governor departed with a police escort. The executive agreed to go directly to his town-house, which was to be immediately placed under heavy guard. Warden Gale went along in the Governor's car. Back in the library, Keene drew from his pocket the note he had taken from the body of Judge Gaylord and studied it with a powerful glass that lay on his desk. His scrutiny ended, he looked up at his young friend and aid.

"On the same paper as the threatening letters received by the judge during the past weeks," observed Keene. "Also written with the same typewriter. I have the other letters here in a drawer of this desk."

WHILE Garth watched and listened closely, the great detective showed him numerous peculiarities by which it was proven that the same machine had been used in typing all the letters.

"I would give a great deal to know where that machine

is at this moment," declared Keene, tucking all the letters back into a drawer of the desk.

"How shall we go about finding it?" asked Garth.

"I'm not sure that we shall go about it," answered Keene. "There may be more urgent and important things to do. I confess that I am at a loss as to where I shall begin. This thing is so stupendous. There is no precedent. There seem so many places to take hold—and yet none! I'm going for a walk while I do some thinking. In the meantime you might study those letters some more. We might take a notion to have a look for the typewriter. In any case, letters can tell so much in other than the intended way. Never fail to study any letters in any case closely."

"Then you want me to stay here until you return?" asked Garth.

"Yes," answered Keene, "and I want you to remain for the night—perhaps several nights."

Keene took his hat and a light topcoat and walked from the house. Garth turned toward the table and settled himself for the suggested study of the letters.

MORE than an hour later the telephone rang, rousing John Garth from his study of the typed pages. Garth answered to hear the voice of Marshall Bradford on the wire.

"Is Paul Keene there?" asked the publisher. His voice trembled with excitement.

"No," answered Garth. "He went out for a walk awhile ago. He should be back soon. This is John Garth speaking."

"I recognized your voice," answered the publisher. "A terrible thing has just happened. Tell Keene to call me at the paper as soon as he returns."

"What has happened?" asked Garth.

"The Governor has been kidnaped," answered Bradford.

"What?"

"Governor Manning has been kidnaped. A gang of men armed with machine-guns attacked the police escort that was taking him to his home. Four of the policemen and the Governor's chauffeur were killed outright. Warden Gale and the rest of the officers are in the hospital badly wounded."

"Good heavens!" cried Garth. "The Governor and the warden had just left this house, following the removal of Judge Gaylord's body. You know about that, of course?"

"Yes," answered Bradford. "This is a terrible mess. God knows what will happen next. Tell Keene to call me at once when he comes in."

"I will," answered Garth.

Hanging up the receiver, Garth walked to the door and looked up and down the quiet street, hoping to see Keene approaching. He was disappointed. A quick fear for his friend's safety seized him. He turned back to the library, but a few moments later emerged from the house and walked swiftly down the street. He reasoned that Keene had probably gone to the near-by park for his stroll. He meant to find him as quickly as possible.

The telephone was ringing as Garth opened the door of Paul Keene's home on his return from a fruitless search of the park. Fear tugging at his heart, Garth strode across the room and answered.

"Hello! Garth?" It was the excited voice of Marshall Bradford.

"Yes."

"Come up to my office quickly," cried Bradford. "These murderers have abducted Paul Keene and the mayor. I'll tell you all I know about it when you get here. Keene has often spoken quite highly to me of your detective ability. God knows it is needed now. Hurry down here."

"I'm coming."

Fifteen minutes later, John Garth was confronting the white-faced publisher across the big desk in Bradford's private office.

"Tell me everything that has happened," demanded Garth.

"They have the Governor, the mayor and Paul Keene prisoners," answered Bradford. "I don't know how they got Keene—but a small army of gunmen raided the mayor's home, killed his butler, wounded two of the other servants and dragged the mayor off in his dressing-gown. Here is a letter that just came to the *Planet* by a messenger boy."

And he handed a typed sheet to Garth. It was on the same paper as the notes Garth had studied earlier in the night and a brief scrutiny showed him that it had been typed on the same machine. It read:

To the press:

We are holding Governor Manning, Mayor Tanner and Detective Paul Keene prisoners. A pardon for Velvet Bill Hayden will soon be signed by the Governor. When it reaches Lieutenant-governor Larsen, it had better be honored promptly, or our distinguished prisoners will be sent to join Judge Gaylord.

When Hayden has been freed we will continue to hold your friends until he is safe in Honduras. They will be treated decently and released as soon as we receive word of Hayden's arrival in Honduras.

If Hayden is not released, the trouble is only started. We mean business.

THE PACK.

John Garth's face was gray as he laid down the note.

His eyes met those of Bradford.

"Has it really come to where the law is powerless against these murderers?" asked the publisher hoarsely.

"It's like fighting a phantom," muttered Garth, shaking his head. "There is nothing—no one—to strike back at! They evidently believe in the adage that dead men tell no tales. They murder ruthlessly and on a wholesale basis. After all these outrages there is not so much as the license-number of an auto to work on—no fingerprints—no clues of any kind. I'm beginning to think that we had better release Hayden. His execution is not so important as the lives that have already been taken—to say nothing of the others that may be sacrificed."

"Perhaps you are right," agreed the publisher. "But it will be a bitter defeat, after the years of fighting. It will mean turning the underworld loose like a pack of wolves on the city. It is hard to decide."

IT was well past midnight when Garth left Bradford's office. They had decided to try to get a little rest and see what would happen on the following day.

On the following day the town was in turmoil. The morning papers had carried the news of the happenings of the night before. Citizens' committees and various

civic and business organizations went into huddles. Everybody was giving advice to anyone who seemed in a position to do anything.

The overwhelming demand was for the immediate release of Velvet Bill and a truce with the pack of human wolves who had declared bloody warfare on society and government. The voices of those who saw the ultimate outcome of such a truce were drowned in the clamor of those who would save the prisoners from the pack at any price.

Then, shortly after nine o'clock in the morning, the bullet-riddled body of Governor Manning was found in some shrubbery in a public park. The body was still warm. A note pinned to the blood-stained shirt read:

He refused to sign Velvet Bill Hayden's pardon. Now Lieutenant-governor Larsen can sign it. If it is not signed before tomorrow morning, we will bump off Mayor Tanner and Paul Keene.

THE PACK.

Later on that hectic day, in the private office of Marshall Bradford, the publisher and John Garth sat facing each other. Both men showed the strain of the past two days.

"It looks like I am about to lose that fool bet I made with Hayden in the courtroom," observed Bradford. "I don't care—if it will only stop this slaughter."

"That's the hell of it," answered Garth. "We must win this battle, or we leave the city open to such things as this—or even worse things—at any time!"

"I don't see how we *can* win," declared Bradford. "The happenings of the past forty-eight hours have stirred the public up to such a pitch that there seems to be no way out—except the release of Hayden."

"What does Lieutenant-governor Larsen say?"

"He refuses to sign the pardon. Says that if Governor Manning was willing to die rather than sign it under duress, so is he."

"Where is Larsen?"

"At his home. He has called out two companies of militia to guard him. Says he will see no one nor sign anything until Hayden has been executed."

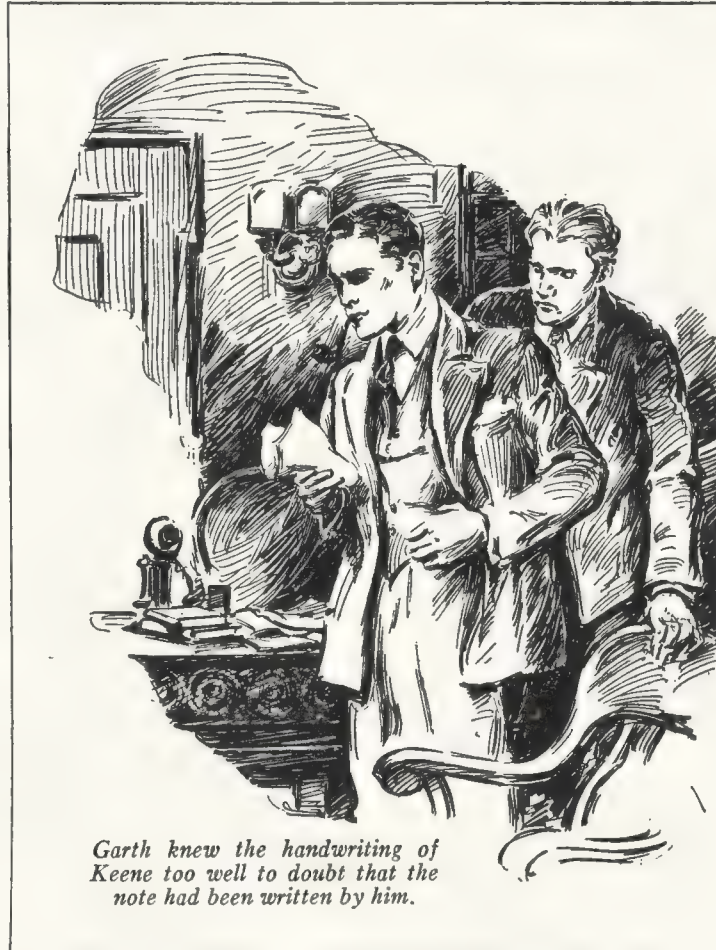
"I admire his nerve, if not his sense," nodded Garth.

"So do I," admitted Bradford. "But I can't match them."

"At the same time," observed Garth, "we can do nothing toward the releasing of Hayden without the consent and aid of Larsen."

"Not unless the people storm the State prison and release him by force," replied the publisher.

"Slim chance of that," opined Garth. "Not with four National Guard outfits in addition to all the extra guards on the job."



Garth knew the handwriting of Keene too well to doubt that the note had been written by him.

"If there were only some way to speed up the procedure," said the publisher, "and execute Hayden today!"

"But there isn't," reminded Garth. "He can only be executed on the day and in the manner set forth by Judge Gaylord, whose lips are now forever sealed."

"I have an idea!" exclaimed Bradford, reaching for the telephone. A moment later he gave the operator a number—the blind number at the home of Lieutenant-governor Larsen. After ten minutes of conversation, the publisher turned back to face Garth.

"I guess you followed most of that," said Bradford. "We are going to play for time. Larsen has agreed. We will get out an extra immediately. It will carry our offer to these murderers who call themselves the Pack. They are to cease killing for three days while we try to get the legal machinery into shape to release Hayden. That will give us three days in which to try to run them to earth. If we can do nothing in that time, the attitude of the public will permit us to do nothing but release Hayden."

"Three days," said Garth slowly. "It's a big order!"

TWENTY minutes later the *Planet* extra was on the street. It brought quick results: a messenger-boy, who had been stopped on the street by a man in working-garments and given a dollar to deliver, brought a note to the office of the *Planet*. The extra had been on the street less than two hours when the note arrived. It read:

Your bluff is called. We will wait the three days. But you had better have Hayden free by that time. If you fail, the mayor, Paul Keene and plenty of others will die.

THE PACK.

It took John Garth but a few moments to determine that the note was written on the same paper and by the same machine that had typed the other communications.

"Well?" demanded Bradford, who had been watching while Garth scrutinized the note.

"It's not well," declared Garth. "I can't see that we have gained a thing. There is no place to take hold. There's no way to know whom we are fighting. Either you or I might meet our arch-enemy on the street tomorrow—this afternoon—and not recognize him. We will use our three days, I suppose, but I will not promise to accomplish a thing."

"But, man, we *must* accomplish something!" cried the publisher. "Surely you haven't forgotten what it means to lose?"

"No," answered Garth, "I haven't; but I feel absolutely helpless."

"Listen—" cried Bradford, then stopped as the telephone on his desk rang. He answered the call. A few moments later he snapped up the receiver and whirled about to face Garth.

"They have kidnaped Franklin Gorman, chief of police," cried the publisher. "That was one of my reporters on the telephone. They grabbed Gorman at the door of the Calumet Restaurant as he came out after his lunch. Threw him into a car without license-plates and sped away."

"They are a busy bunch," observed Garth. "The best thing I can think of is to sit tight. We'll hear from them soon."

Garth's guess proved correct. It was less than half an hour until a note arrived at the *Planet* office. Bradford tore it open. The note read:

We now have Chief of Police Gorman. We will deliver his corpse with the others, if Velvet Bill Hayden is not freed at the specified time.

THE PACK.

"Same paper—same machine," said Garth. "And that is as far as we get. This is the most baffling thing in the world. It does no good to check up on the source of telephone-calls or messages. There is no clue anywhere.

I feel beaten. I'm going home and try to make my brain do something."

"God knows I wish you all the luck in the world," said Bradford, as Garth rose and moved toward the door.

"I'll need it," retorted Garth. "Telephone me if anything more happens."

"I will," Bradford promised.

JOHAN GARTH lived alone in a roomy, comfortable apartment well out in the residence district. In his living-room the young detective settled down to wrestle with the problem that confronted him. On every tangent he found himself confronted by a stone wall. Daylight was seeping in around the curtains when there came a tap at his door.

On the point of calling an invitation to the visitor to enter, Garth checked his tongue and pulled open a drawer of his desk. From the drawer he took a heavy automatic revolver. With quick, noiseless steps he darted to the portières that covered a semi-circular window nook, and stepped behind them just as the rap at the door was repeated.

"Come in," called Garth, now hidden by the portières which he had left parted by a narrow crack through which he could see the entering caller or callers.

The door opened and four men with drawn guns burst into the room. Garth recognized the leader as Tom Denton, an ex-pugilist and notorious gangster. The visitors halted just inside the door and darted quick glances over the empty room. In a flash Garth realized that they had come to add him to their captives. He did not hesitate; the army had taught him how to use the weapon in his hand. He used it.

Under the stream of lead that leaped from behind the portières the four gangsters wilted like grain before the sickle. Two of the gunmen fired in the direction of the portières as they fell, but Garth was not hit. A moment later the young detective had leaped across the room and closed and locked the door. Then he strode to the desk, procured some cartridges and reloaded the automatic. He then turned to inspect the result of his marksmanship and found that he had done a good job. His floor was littered with four dead gangsters.

Stepping quickly to the telephone, he snatched the receiver from the hook.

"Hello, Frank," he said a moment later, recognizing the voice of the house operator who answered. "Give me police headquarters and let no one come up to my apartment until the police arrive. There has been a little trouble up here."

"I know it, sir," answered the operator. "Folks in the neighboring apartments are calling me about it. Here's your number."

HALF an hour later the bodies of the four gangsters had been removed from the apartment and a police guard was stationed at the door. Supplied by the police with the identity of the four men he had killed, Garth sat down to try to see if he could fit his victims into the picture in any manner that would help with his problem.

The dead men had, after all, been but small fry in the organization against which the city and State government was now pitted.

Garth was still sitting in frowning thought when his telephone rang. He answered, to hear the voice of Marshall Bradford on the wire.

"Hello, Garth," said the publisher. "I just heard of what you did to those hoodlums. Good work!"

"I'm wondering whether it was or not," answered Garth.

"Listen," went on Bradford. "A note just came to me

from Paul Keene. He tells me that we are whipped, that the best thing we can do is to prevail upon Larsen to pardon Hayden. He also says that I am to show the letter to you in order to stop you from doing anything that may result in the death of himself and the others who are prisoners with him. Shall I come out to your place and bring the note?"

"By all means do," answered Garth; "I'm curious to see that note."

"I'll start at once."

It was just a few minutes past eight o'clock when Marshall Bradford entered Garth's apartment. He handed the young detective a sheet of paper. Garth unfolded it and read:

"Dear Bradford:

"We are beaten. There is no Doubt in my mind About that. There is Now nothing for us to do but release Velvet Bill. We Have no Alternative. We must Recognize The fact that the battle is Ended. It is a Rotten Break, but Rather than sacrifice hundreds of lives, After all It is better Not to Send Hayden to hell. The Racketeers Are too well Intrrenched. They dominate the situation. No Doubt Hundreds of men In the city could be Shot down by them in a few Hours. The Only way out is to Make peace with them on their own terms. Speed up the pardon of Hayden and End this mess. Show this letter to John Garth and tell him not to do anything rash.

"PAUL KEENE."

John Garth knew the handwriting of his friend, Paul Keene, too well to doubt for a moment that the note had been written by the famous detective. Nevertheless, he could not believe that the note carried the genuine sentiment of Keene. There seemed to be something out of the ordinary about the note. Suddenly he remembered what Keene had said to him: "In any case, letters can tell so much in other than the intended way. Never fail to study any letters in any case closely."

He turned his attention back to the note and studied it closely. After a few moments he looked up at Bradford.

"Mr. Bradford," said Garth, "please leave this note with me—I want to study it."

When Bradford had gone, Garth sat down and began to pore over the note. Something like half an hour had passed when he noticed that there were many words in the letter capitalized where no capitalization should have been used. Pulling a blank sheet of paper from the drawer of the desk he began to pick out and set down in order the misplaced capital letters in the note.

A low whistle of amazement escaped Garth as he read the message thus culled from Keene's letter.

DAN HARTER BRAINS. RAID HIS HOME.

Once more, Garth checked over the letter to make sure that he had made no mistake.

Then he leaned back in his chair and sat there for a long time with his eyes closed in thought. The thing seemed impossible. Dan Harter was one of the city's wealthiest men. He held an enviable place in the social, business and political circles of the town. He was known as one of the leading brokers of the business world, an authority on stocks and bonds and a plunger who had taken numerous large fortunes out of the market in a single day.

Moreover, Harter was a brother-in-law of Marshall Bradford, the publisher. Bradford's wife was Dan Harter's sister. In one way it seemed impossible that Harter was the brains of the Pack. But in another way it fitted in perfectly. His brokerage business made a perfect blind. His home, located in the middle of a sixty-acre estate, an hour's ride from the city, was an ideal stronghold for such a lot of modern buccaneers as had placed themselves behind Velvet Bill Hayden.

"Jerusalem!" muttered Garth. "Dan Harter! It isn't possible—and yet it is the only thing that is possible! One thing at least is certain. There'll be no

getting anywhere with the police in this. With the power Harter wields, there's no telling which cops may be on his pay-roll."

For several more moments the young detective sat in silent thought. Then he gave an exclamation of satisfaction and reached for the telephone. Presently he was talking with Martin Donahue, State Commander of the American Legion.

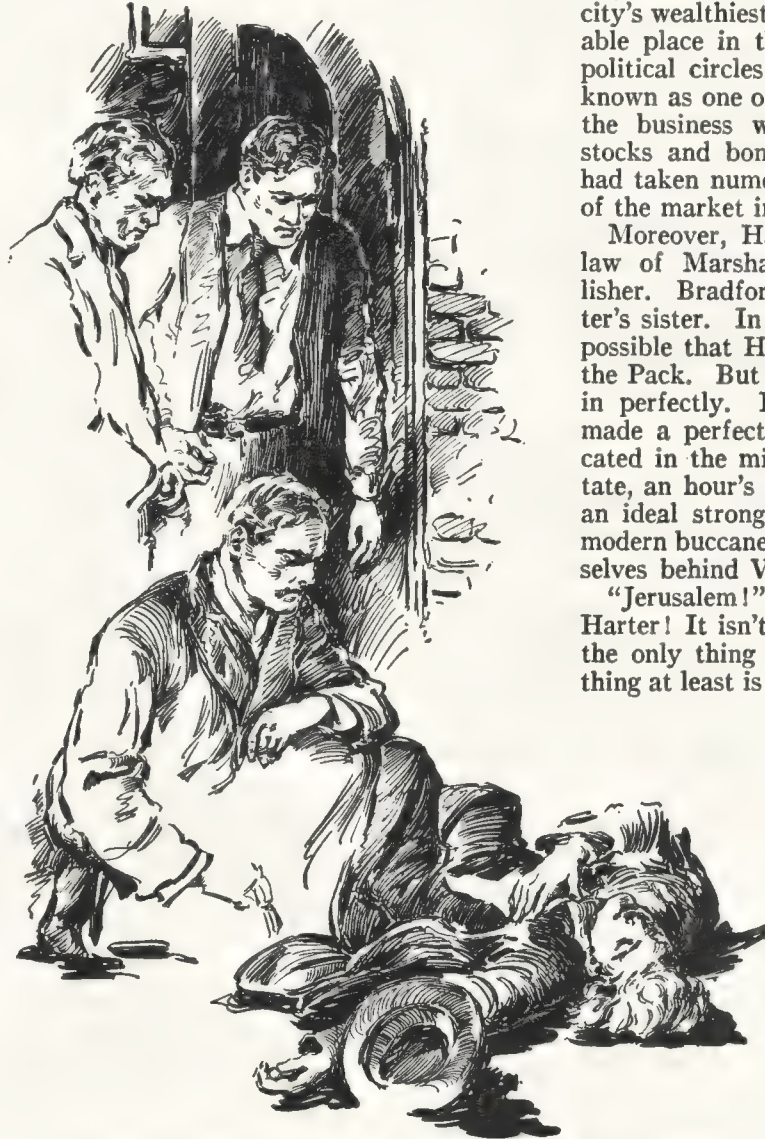
Donahue and Garth had been buddies in the A. E. F.

"Listen, Martin," said Garth. "I want you to come over to my apartment at once. Say nothing to anybody about where you are coming. What I want to see you about is a very important matter."

"I'll be over in a jiffy," answered Donahue.

The jiffy proved to be about ten minutes. Donahue, a big Celt of the type known as "black Irish," shook hands with Garth, and then demanded to be told what it was all about. Motioning his guest to a chair, Garth proceeded to explain.

"And," said Garth presently, "you can see that we would be very foolish to go to the police. I feel that we have suddenly been placed in a position where we can win over this crew of murderers, if we can get together a bunch of fighting-men who can be trusted to the last ditch."



"Judge Gaylord is quite dead," said Keene. "We must leave the body where it is until the coroner arrives."

"I'm away ahead of you!" cried Donahue. "Where else would you find such a gang as quickly as in the ranks of the Legion?"

"That's it," nodded Garth. "Do you think we could get together a hundred of the boys who could be trusted and would be willing to see this thing through, no matter what sort of a scrap it leads into?"

"Within two hours I can find you a hundred ex-dough-boys who are just aching for a battle!" said Donahue.

"They must understand that they are acting without the sanction of the law," said Garth.

"I can promise you that not a one of them will give a whoop in hell about that after I tell them the circumstances."

"In that case," nodded Garth, "let's get going. I want to do a little checking-up to be absolutely sure of my ground. Can I depend upon you to mobilize your buddies and have them all ready at the American Legion hall by noon?"

"You can."

"Good," nodded Garth. "And remember—do not tell any of the boys anything over the telephone. Just get them together at the hall. I will talk to them there. We must move with extreme caution and strike quickly when we strike."

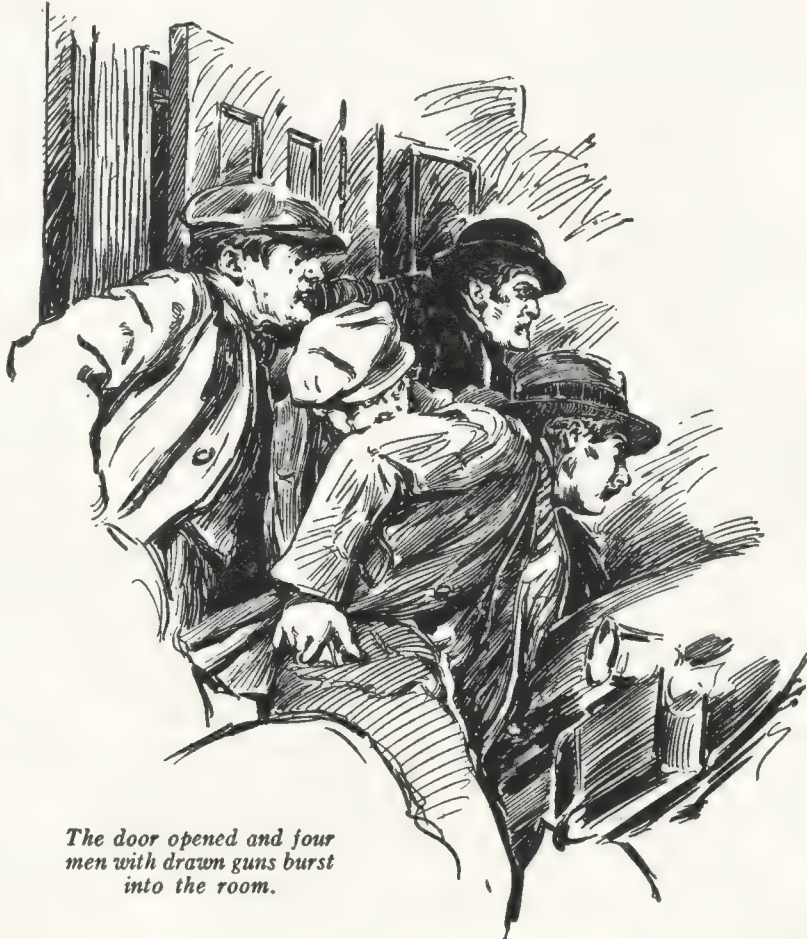
"I'll remember," declared Donahue, "and I'll have the gang together in short order."

Donahue fulfilled his promise. When John Garth entered the American Legion hall shortly after eleven o'clock, a few more than a hundred men were gathered.

Introduced briefly by Donahue, Garth proceeded to tell the men why they had been called together. He read Paul Keene's note and told how he had found the concealed message. He impressed them with the gravity of what they were about to be asked to do. The gathered Legionnaires listened in silence—a silence that grew more and more grim as they listened. When the matter was put to a vote their answer was unanimous: "Let's go!"

"Thanks," said Garth. "Now here is the program. I take it for granted that you all came armed with small arms. We will want a rifle-squad. Your commander tells me that there are rifles enough here at the hall to arm half of you. Commander Donahue will pick out the best rifle-shots, issue rifles and take charge of the rifle-brigade. The rest of you will be my crew.

"I have learned, with the assistance of a friend whom I know can be trusted, that Dan Harter will be at his office until two o'clock. Those of you who are to go with me will look to your weapons and see that they are in shape. You will carry them out of sight, but where you can get at them quickly.



The door opened and four men with drawn guns burst into the room.

"We will pay a call to Harter's office, arriving at exactly twelve-thirty. Donahue and his riflemen will leave here at once, riding four men to a car, with the rifles out of sight until they are needed. The riflemen will time their expedition to arrive at Harter's home at twelve-thirty. They will then carry out Donahue's orders.

"At twelve-thirty-five, four planes will appear over the house and patrol the air to prevent any devilment on the part of those three blue ships that gassed Velvet Bill's escort. The planes for which I have arranged are Number

One craft and will be piloted by men who know their business. All you boys with Donahue have to worry about is the capture of Harter's home and rescuing the prisoners held there."

"We'll do that," Donahue promised.

"Good," said Garth, glancing at his watch.

"Pick your riflemen. It's time you were moving. I'll instruct my gang here after you are on your way. We have only seven blocks to go."

At twenty-five minutes past twelve Garth, followed by his forty-two carefully instructed men, straggled casually into the ornate lobby of the Daniel Harter Building and approached the elevators in small chatting groups. Three minutes later they were all in the long corridor on the eighth floor at the end of

which was located the office of the man they sought. Garth flung open the outer door and leaped inside with drawn gun. His Legionnaires followed eagerly.

It was the lunch hour, and there were but four persons in the big outer office. Three of these were girls who sat at typewriters and the fourth was a shifty-eyed, dark man who sat at a desk beside the door marked:

DANIEL HARTER
Private

With long strides, Garth and the two men who had entered at his shoulders sprang toward that door. One of the Legionnaires thrust the muzzle of an automatic pistol against the body of the shifty-eyed man. The fellow's face went pale and he strangled on what he had meant to make a cry of warning.

The room was now filled with Legionnaires. The door of the private office gave inward to the assault of Garth and the nearest of his men. Seated at a big desk in the luxurious office, Dan Harter looked up in surprise as the door burst open. Then his face went suddenly white.

"What is the meaning of this, Garth?" demanded the pseudo-broker, in an attempt at indignation.

"It means that your gunmen failed to get me this morning," answered Garth. "It also means that we have dis-

covered that you are the he-wolf of the bloodthirsty pack that has been behind the recent outrages in an effort to prevent the execution of Velvet Bill Hayden."

"Are you crazy?" demanded Harter, through gray lips.

"No," answered Garth, "and you know it! We are taking you over to the American Legion Hall. The round-up of your pack has begun. There will soon be a lot of you keeping Velvet Bill Hayden company behind bars."

"I'll call the police," cried Harter.

"You'll call nothing," answered Garth. "You will come along with us, and if you make one funny move, you will die in your tracks. We will explain your demise after it has happened. Get up and come along!"

Under the direction of Garth the Legionaires and their captives left the building as they had come, attracting little attention. The three girls and the shifty-eyed man were taken along.

IN a short time the grim-faced Legionaires were gathered about their captives in the Legion hall. Each exit was guarded by four men.

"Listen, Harter," said Garth, facing the cowering man. "Another gang of men with what it takes to do the job are out at your home now to release the prisoners you have out there. They will bring back everybody they find in or around your place. We want the names of the other ringleaders of this precious pack of yours—and we want them quickly. If you want to save your rotten hide, the best thing you can do is turn State's evidence before some of the rest of the ones we round up beat you to it."

"You talk like a fool!" suddenly screamed Dan Harter, leaping to his feet. "Turning State's evidence would buy me nothing whatever. I have been unlucky in being caught—that is all. You nitwits have gained nothing but my death and the death of the others whom you hope to rescue! Our gang can and will whip you. I'll tell you nothing. Moreover, you will all be dead before you know it. The Pack is ready and willing to kill a few hundred as quickly as a dozen."

"Just a minute," snapped a stalwart young Scandinavian named Swanson, stepping out of the crowd. "Let me try a few things on this guy—and he'll tell us anything! I learned from the Germans how to loosen up a fellow's tongue—only it was *my* tongue that was loosened. That's why I remember so well!"

"Fine, Swede, have at the dirty skunk," cried a voice from the group. "We'll all help you."

"Take those women into another room," said Swanson.

"Hear that?" demanded Garth, his cold eyes meeting Harter's. "Will you tell us what we want to know now—or later?"

Harter had backed away from the Legionaires who had been standing near him. He glared at his captors, frightened but defiant. Suddenly his hand flew to his mouth. He swallowed quickly and leaped still farther back.

"Go to hell—all of you!" he snarled. "I realize that I am caught. I'm finished—but *you'll* never win! That was a capsule of cyanide that I just swallowed. I'll be dead in a couple more minutes—and I won't have long to wait for all of you in hell!"

Five minutes later the lifeless body of Dan Harter lay on a lounge against the wall. A doctor, hastily summoned, was too late to do anything but pronounce the man dead.

Meanwhile Donahue and his raiding party had arrived at the home of Dan Harter. The train of cars swung into the graveled drive and halted. More than sixty men, armed with rifles, poured from the cars and quickly encircled the imposing mansion. Four men were taken cap-

tive in a lodge at the gate and one of them was sent into the house to deliver the ultimatum of the raiders.

"Tell that bunch of coyotes," ordered Donahue. "That we have come after them and we mean to have them. Tell them to come out with their prisoners and come out quick, or we'll start taking the house to pieces."

The man went into the house, muttering a surly sentence as he went. The cordon of riflemen stood in sober silence, waiting with weapons at the ready. Suddenly the deadly sputter of half a dozen machine-guns broke the silence. A dozen of the Legionaires dropped in their tracks and the rest, remembering the days in France, darted for cover. The battle was on!

The machine-guns continued to pour their hail of death from the windows of the mansion. The rifle-men, in cover, answered with regularity and disconcerting accuracy. From the east four army planes suddenly appeared, taking up a patrol above the scene of battle. If the blue buzzards allied with the wolf-pack put in an appearance, they would find foemen worthy of their steel!

Back at the Legion hall, Swanson and a half-dozen buddies emerged from an anteroom where they had retired with the shifty-eyed secretary of the late Dan Harter. Swanson flung the quaking, gray-faced fellow into a chair and faced John Garth.

"We've got all the names we want," said Swanson. "We also found out that that gang out at Harter's house has an arsenal of machine-guns and the like. Maybe we had better get to the boys with reinforcements."

"You and these boys get out and gather in the others of this pack," said Garth. "Give them no time to duck. I'll attend to the reinforcing. With what we know now, I'll have no trouble getting Larsen to act."

After listening for a few minutes to what Garth said over the telephone, Larsen acted. Within an hour the Harter home was surrounded by a thousand armed men—police, militia and Legionaires. The four planes continued to patrol the air above, but the blue buzzards did not appear.

Another of the prisoners, taken at the gate, was sent in with another message to his fellow-gangsters. This time the message got results. In ten minutes the inmates of the place filed out with their hands in the air. With them came Paul Keene and the others who had been held.

The besiegers took charge of their captives and escorted the released men in triumph back to the city. There they found that Swanson and his crew had rounded up eight more of the pack's ringleaders. The power of the pack was broken. Those who were not captured or killed fled into exile. The three blue planes were found later on a hunting preserve that had belonged to Dan Harter. Their pilots were among the ones who escaped.

That evening's papers told the story, giving full credit to the Legionaires for the action they had taken. The tide of public opinion turned with a vengeance, rising high behind the forces of law, order and decency.

VELVET BILL died on schedule in the electric chair. Marshall Bradford collected the money he had wagered with Hayden and distributed it among the families of the men who had died before the guns of the Pack.

A horde of grinning Legionaires went quickly back to their jobs. They had been heroes before; they knew just how long it would take the tumult and the shouting to die. They were satisfied to have once more shown their country and their flag that they were ready.

This is the only boast ever made—and it is for their own gratification. On the wall of the Legion hall hangs a rug, made from the pelt of a wolf. It was taken by a Legionaire from a room in the ruined home of Dan Harter. A brass plate above the pelt bears the legend: "*Our Meat.*"

Mississippi Magic

The swirling eddies and treacherous cross-currents of the great river find their counterpart in the human life it bears on its bosom.

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

The Story So Far:

ONE of the most famous "river-rats" on the Mississippi was Red Rufus, of many aliases. Red, accomplished in make-up, could adapt himself to any society, was extremely affable, and utterly without conscience. While Red Rufus was looking for victims, Heaven sent what looked to be three.

The first was a mysterious woman, young and beautiful, traveling alone on a shanty-boat. She warned Red away, with a shotgun. The second was Judson Miles, amateur detective, looking for this woman, who was wanted in Syracuse, but not subject to arrest. Red sent the detective on a false scent, expertly picked his pockets, and was left in charge of the unsuspecting detective's motor-boat. Red made away with the motor-boat, shaved off his ruddy beard, and got himself a change of attire.

The third object of Red's interest was Joseph Howard Smith, an erstwhile newspaper-reporter, studying the habits of the river people for the purpose of fiction material which he intended to write under the pseudonym of Travers Wilicum. Wilicum had gained the confidence of the shanty-boaters along the river because he acknowledged his alias, and because of his naïvete. They gladly gave him material, and directed him to Red Rufus as a likely source for more.

Travers Wilicum came upon Red Rufus in his new attire, on the stolen motor-boat. He didn't suspect that it was Red. After an evening of pleasant chat, Wilicum awakened to find his skiff adrift in the main channel and heading for a row of barges. Barely escaping this peril, he discovered that his outboard motor, his cooking-kit and his money were gone.

Rowing madly upriver, he chanced upon the mysterious girl who now used the name of Helen Grey—which Wilicum himself had playfully given her—and Mrs. Mahna, one of the river inhabitants. The women had recovered his outboard motor for him, and informed him that the thief was the famous Red Rufus.

Meanwhile, Judson Miles had interviewed the Mendova City police and identified Red Rufus. While the detective and the police started after the ruffian, Travers Wilicum was again on his way upriver, bent on capturing the river pirate. (*The story continues in detail:*)

RED RUFUS was rather more pleased than not on account of his meeting with Mrs. Mahna and the pretty river tripper. His vanity was tickled to find himself



Luck was with him; he was safe again in the bosom of Old Mississipp'!

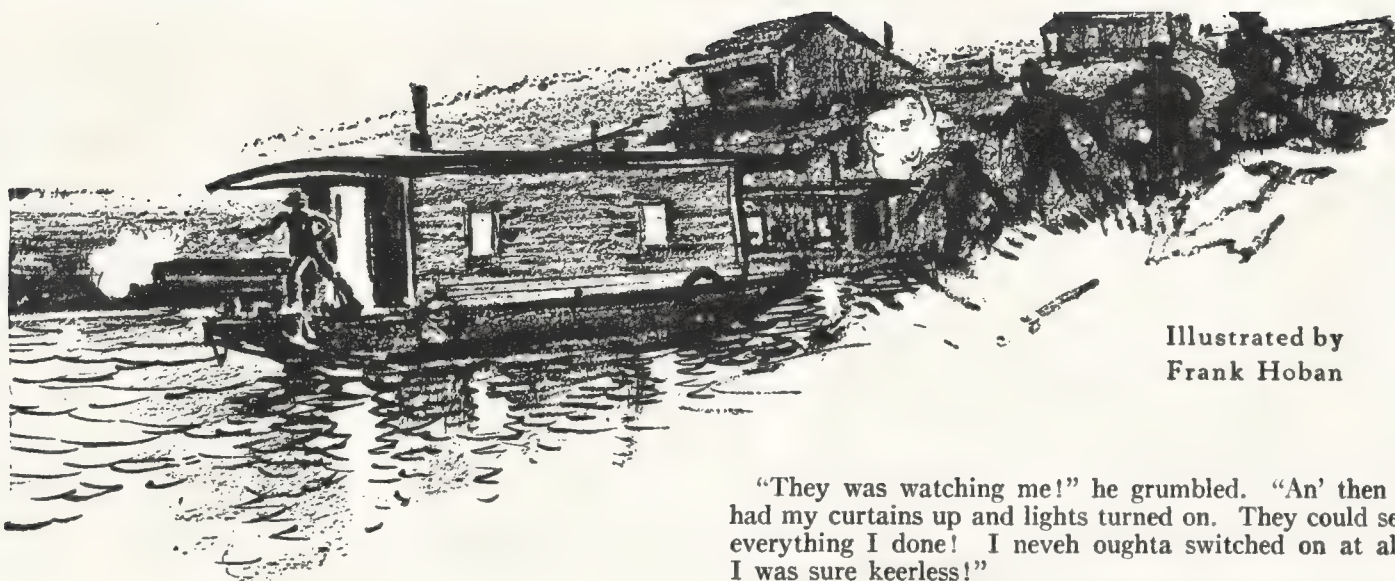
called a rascal in such semi-admiring tones. He was sorry to lose the outboard motor, but he didn't need it, nor the gas-stove, the cooking outfit and whatever "the girls" had taken. He was conscious of recurring disappointment and wonder every time he counted the soft-paw's money. Surely he must have overlooked the history-writer's main board!

There were nine \$10 treasury certificates. Loose change amounted in silver and nickels to \$4.55. Red couldn't find any more than that. He was sure no soft-paw would ever start down the Mississippi with a three-hundred-fifty-dollar outfit and hardly a hundred dollars in money.

"Why, he'd spend that, spreeing and playing to Palura's in one night!" Red Rufus told himself. "He can't get no hist'ries to amount to anything on less'n a hundred dollars! Them writin'-fellers has to have lots of money, if they're going to tell stories—that stands to reason. They got to be rich! Anybody knows that. I bet he had thousands of dollars hid out on me. That scoundrel cheated me. Huh! Ninety-four-fifty-five! That aint chicken feed—that aint hardly table money!"

Uneasily he watched in all directions. He didn't really expect anything to happen, but long experience had taught him that in the fairest hours afloat the unexpected was likely to be close at hand. When night fell he dropped back downstream a mile to duck into the mouth of a bayou back in the timber brakes. He didn't feel sleepy, so he rigged a jacklight out of a flashlight which he telephoned-wired to Detective Judson Miles' best hat, and went hunting 'coon and 'possum with a single-barrel shotgun which Miles had acquired with the launch.

Inland the river-rat found a flock of ducks resting in a broadwater, and promptly disturbed their repose with a charge of No. 5 shot. He spent an hour fishing his three victims out of the dead, breathless waters. Then as he was tired, he headed for the launch again, following along the bank of the meandering bayou. He hadn't kept any



Illustrated by
Frank Hoban

special track of how far he had gone, nor did he view with care any of the landmarks. He felt that this wasn't necessary, for he knew the river bottoms and timber brakes so well that his intelligence was backed by the instinct of years of experience.

He was surprised when he arrived at the Mississippi. His chin dropped. There was no mistaking that surging torrent dragging along the twelve or fifteen miles of horse-shoe bend. Where, then, was his—*his*—glass-cabin cruising-launch? He studied the mouth of the bayou, making sure by the landmarks that he hadn't come down another one. He hadn't. He recognized a gum tree on the top of the bank and a cypress snag sticking out of the south side of the bayou.

He turned and hurried up the bayou around bend after turn. He had gone into the bayou probably a fifth or a quarter of a mile. He searched for half a mile—and found no launch!

"Those dad-blasted thieves!" he cursed. "Them damned scoundrels set me up the bank! They took my boat—they robbed me!"

He returned along the bayou bank and at last located the exact snag root to which he had moored the glass-cabin launch by the bow-line, and the sapling tree to which he had tied the stern so she wouldn't swing. His flashlight revealed the footprints, not his own, which had gone sliding eagerly down the steep bayou bank to the landing-log, where they left clods of clay from their dirty feet.

Evidently a man and a woman had stolen the river pirate's gasoline boat.

"Aint that the limit!" Red Rufus exploded. "A man don't no more'n git comfortable an' some scamp comes along an' sets him up the bank. Here I be ten mile from nowheres, too! If I wouldn't sink them in old Mississipp'— Why, theh aint *nobody* safe down heah no more! Dad-whanged meddlin', ornery, no-'count—"

Red Rufus wandered off into all the futilities of relieving, safety-valve profanity. He went down the bank on his hands and knees studying the footprints of those who were so misbegotten and reckless that they didn't care a whoop who they stole from, just so they took something. One was a man's tracks, the other a woman's tracks—no doubt about it.

"What they doing here? Where'd they come from?" Red puzzled. Turning the other way on his hands and knees, and finally stooping as he walked, he trailed the two among the trees to a tall, seven-foot gum tree. Here the two had stood looking around first one side and then the other.

"They was watching me!" he grumbled. "An' then I had my curtains up and lights turned on. They could see everything I done! I neveh oughta switched on at all. I was sure keerless!"

The two had come, the man leading the woman in his footsteps from down the bayou. They had come up the river bank a quarter of a mile. Behind a tree-top which had caved in Red found an old fisher skiff, with a few odds and ends of camp outfit, including a square box of sand which was still warm from cooking an evening meal. An old suitcase contained a few odds and ends of garments, masculine and female. The skiff was pretty good, sound and dry. One of the oars had been broken, but mended by nailing two splints along it, and then winding with wire.

"They traded with me!" Red Rufus choked impotently. "Theh I was all fixed, plumb comfy—and now look't! Nothing but an old tarp an' some ragged blankets to wrap up in. Dad-blasted ol' Mississipp'!"

He knew whom to blame—that old coiling muddy-gut out there, chuckling along both edges, treating none so outrageously as those who like him most!

"I put up with a sight 'n' heap from *you*, I have!" Red addressed the river. "Sometime I'll git mad an' quit yo' flat! Yo' don't protect nobody from blamed crooks—leavin' me up the bank!"

HIS weariness was spoiled. He jerked the knotted line from the skiff-mooring and shoved off. He swung out into the main current and hooking his heels over the seat, he clasped his arms around his shins, rested his chin on his knees and floated downstream just clear of the short eddies at the edge of the flood.

Glowing, his eyes shining like fireworms in the gloom, Red Rufus let himself go. The way he felt, he didn't care if Old Mississipp' dried all up and blew away. Nothing but disappointments and surprises came to a man down it anyhow! Fellow might just as well marry and settle behind the levees, for all the comfort river-rattng gave a body.

At intervals Red spied a shanty-boat floating in a short eddy. When he swung into the crossing down at the foot of the bend, he discovered three cabins moored at the head of the long sandbar, and around the edge he saw another one staked close in. Below in the dead eddy were anchored two more, and a regular trunk-cabin motor-boat cruiser. Red regarded each one with cynical contempt. Even if a man did manage to get hold of one, if a scoundrel didn't come along the first time his back was turned, tripping off with it, something else rank was sure to happen.

"Anyhow, I got ninety-four dollars fifty-five cents besides the nine cents I had already," Red estimated. "I better find some place to have a good time before anything interrupts. If I went into some danged town, they'd fine me ninety dollars, an' four dollars sixty cents, costs. That's

how they'd treat me, coming to trade and buy supplies and spend my money, helpin' business. Huh! Well, I was lucky them two pirates didn't take their skiff, too. Then where'd I 'a' been—six-seven miles to the levee an' nothing but brakes! I'm sick of walking levees."

HE sighed, offended at the tribulations visited on him. "I'm tired of being insulted by Old Mississipp'!" he snarled. "I don't know what for a feller gets the habit of this gawsh-forsook country anyhow! Nothing but calamity an' miseries. Where am I, anyhow? That looks like the foot of Wolf Island theh. The chalk bank threw me oveh then, 'cording to that. This'd be Beckwith's Bend. Hickman'll be just down around this bar, then. I don't wanta see anybody to Hickman. Doggone that city marshal they got! His gun's keerless, shootin' me that night in the Commissary. And the papers said he had my fingerprints. There aint no sense to them Bertillon fakers, anyhow. If I had my way, there'd be a law against a city marshal's shooting first, anyhow. Ouch! I can feel that .32-slug going through yet—just like a red hot needle! I was lucky it didn't stop in me, too. The hole bled both ways an' I didn't get blood-poison or nothin'! Been a .45-lead bullet, 'stead of a .32-jacketed, I'd 'a' neveh moved. I noticed the papers kinda complained 'bout his usin' such a small gun—that wa'n't right! How c'n them up-the-bankers expect to punish a feller if they don't catch him alive. Them townfolks make me tired, always wanting somebody killed or electrocuted or sent to jail for life. I'm through with Hickman! When a man's been shot up in a place, he'd oughta neveh go theh ag'in as long's he lives! I'd betteh pull in here in this dune bay. I'll be out of sight."

He paddled into a hook in the huge sandbar and pulled his boat out on the sand. He arranged his tarpaulin and quilts for the greatest ease on the boat-bottom, rolled up and went to sleep with the approach of dawn. As his head was covered the sunshine did not awaken him. When he stirred out, hungry but refreshed, he saw by the sun that it was after three o'clock in the afternoon. He skinned out his ducks, built a fire in the sandbox and broiled him a two-duck meal—feeling lucky to find plenty of salt in the wooden soapbox of supplies left by the couple who had stolen the glass-sided motorboat. As he cooked and ate, his weather-eye disclosed no threatening sign, but pessimistically he refused to believe his perspicuity. If a man doesn't expect anything it always happens.

In the waning of the day he pushed off, to rock awhile in the sandbar deadwater so that he wouldn't be passing Hickman in the daytime. He wasn't going to give any one the satisfaction of discovering him, if he could help it. He passed Hickman eddy soon after dark, however, and close enough to study the shanty-boats, ferryboat, and motorboats along the wharf. He saw at the lower end of the eddy a skiff moored to the bank, with an outboard motor on the stern.

"Somebody's liable to steal that!" he grinned to himself, paddling in with his eyes carefully watching the bank-edge silhouettes against the sky. He reached two strong hands jubilantly to the "Giant Six" on the stern of the big flat-bottom fisherman's skiff, feeling for the thumbscrews. Instead, he found two non-pickable padlocks, and the fastenings were through sheet-iron bolted to the square-tail of the skiff.

Angrily, he went to the bow. Just as he might have expected, a log chain ran through the cutwater and bows to a huge steamboat ring dead-manned into the bank. If he wanted the outboard he would have to saw the skiff in two to carry it away. Even the spark-plugs and loose

parts had been carried away by the careful river-man, when Red came to look under the canvas cover.

"I'll fix him, fastening things up thataway!" Red snarled, and feeling along the water's-edge he found a mixture of fine sand and clay. This he stuffed by handfuls into the spark-plug holes of the outboard motor, remarking: "He can't start that in a week! If I could get at it, I'd just put the sand in the cylinders, so's they'd wear good! Why, even the Gov'ment don't leave ropes around no more, where a feller can junk 'em. I've lost an hour monkeyin' around here! Huh!"

He pushed off and the current carried him swiftly down Hickman Bend. He looked across the river to where he could see the cut in the forest indicating Winchester Slough, down which he had sent the detector Judson Miles, looking for a lonely lady, the object of his search. The memory brought no pleasurable retrospect to Red Rufus. He hadn't hardly become used to the scoundrel's glass-cabin cruiser before some scamp and his wife had taken it.

"I got to watch out for that detector, too!" Red Rufus reflected. "I bet he's squawked bloody murder to police and sheriffs! He looks like that kind. He probably headed up to Hickman Ferry, which'd be nearer the way he'd have to go. I don't know'f I better stop to New Madrid or not. I don't think they got anything special against me. Chief Kinney Wagner aint seen me lately. The woman that keeps the Arkansaw Traveler's Restaurant cooks an awful good chicken—and I got lots of money. I don't know what I better do. I can stop to the Slough Neck whisky-boat, but if I get drunk then I won't have no appetite for chicken when I get to New Madrid. A man just don't know what to do on this plaguey old Mississipp'! If I get drunk I'm liable to talk too much, an' a feller don't know who mout hear him onto a whisky-boat! A man aint safe anywhere—cain't do nothing 'thout taking big chances. I'd go to Tiptonville, but prob'ly they aint forgotten that hardware store we busted open a year ago. By good rights, I oughtn't to stop anywhere along here from above Hickman to below Carruthersville, exceptin' sandbars and short eddies in the brakes. Up Obion Riveh's all right, less'n I got some bad friend up theh who'd know me. Now't I'm scoutin' out ag'in, my beard's growing in. That detector'll be looking for a feller with a red beard, though—uh-h. I better find some walnut shucks an' dye my whiskers, or anyhow my mustache. Seems like a feller's got to work all the time changing himself one way an' anothe! I don't know what to do! I'm hongry—I betteh go right into New Madrid. I can git theh early tonight, 'fore the restaurant closes."

ACCORDINGLY, pulling an impatient oar to help in the current, Red Rufus skirted down in the dusk of evening, close to the three-mile eddy above New Madrid landing. Unobtrusively he landed well above the shanty-boat town and climbing to the top of the bank, circled back and entered the city over the levee. He worked westward along back streets and entered the main street heading towards the river, as though he had just come from inland Missouri or Arkansaw Bottoms somewhere.

Eagerly he quickened his pace when he saw the restaurant where the chicken was particularly good. He entered, having surveyed from without the line of tables and the lunch-counter. There were three couples eating there. One of these looked at Red with a disconcerting sharpness of vision, but he passed that off with an air of utmost indifference. He told the waiter how he wanted his chicken cooked, and sat back at ease, with pleasurable expectation. Seeing a newspaper on the next table but one, he took it. The New Madrid *Bulletin* had given a double

headline to the remarkable experience of Omaha's leading private detective, Judson Miles, who had come down the Mississippi River on a missing-lady case, only to fall into the clutches of the notorious river-pirate, whose real name none knew, but who was listed under no less than twelve aliases, among them Red Rufus, by which the river people generally identified him.

"He is," the reporter had written, "a notorious liar. Even the chief of the Mendova police, Jasper Haddam, warns everyone not to believe anything he says, unless it is corroborated. According to the police he never works, and his criminal specialties indicate that he is quite a jack of all crimes, so to speak, well meriting the term of *bad actor* applied to him with considerable feeling in the latest warning issued by the Mendova authorities regarding the rascal."

Red Rufus carefully folded his paper so that no one would be able to see the particular piece which he was reading. One time, down the Helena district, Red hadn't been cautious about that, and had been laughing in a hotel lobby as he read how search for him was being conducted. Then a hotel detective had spotted him, and the next thing Red knew he was in jail for ten days before he could find a way out. Learning by experience, Red knew better than to show any particular interest in the literature about himself. At the same time, here was something he had to know about. Apparently the detector had come down the river instead of going up to Hickman.

"I hadn't better hang around here long," Red thought to himself, turning from the account of his crimes to the funny page.

Presently the waiter returned with a fine young chicken, lusciously cooked, and heaped high upon a long, narrow platter. On the tray were three thick hot biscuits and a bowl of gravy, middling brown, a large side-dish of boiled onions and four shakers of seasonings. Along with the rest was a mound of sage-dressing about four inches high, and brown, baked in the oven ready for customers. Mrs. Hascomb knew that no dressing should be served less than twenty-four hours after mixing, in order to permit the flavors thoroughly to permeate the *goue*. That was one secret of the Arkansaw Traveler's great success.

As these dishes were laid before him, Red Rufus dropped half a dollar into the waiter's hand and took a spoonful of jelly which was quivering in a dish all its own. Then he noticed that in the dressing was luxury of luxuries—chopped (not machine-mashed) oysters.

"Oh, boy! Oh, boy!" Red Rufus sighed to himself. "With me so hongry I'm afear'd this is a dream!"

Tucking his big white napkin into his waistcoat, and for an instant surveying again this consummation of meals, he saw the front door open. Glancing up, as he faced the entrance, he saw silhouetted in the light the familiar figure of Detective Judson Miles from Omaha. That was bad—but right behind him came the dreadful frame of Chief Kinney Wagner. That settled it.

"This meal's spoiled, no matter what happens!" Red thought to himself, reaching with

tense poise for a ladle of snow-white mashed potatoes, over which ran melting yellow butter. "Doggone—I'm right in sight!"

Of course Red didn't look at the newcomers. He just felt two pairs of lowering eyes surveying the restaurant's interior, patron by patron, face and figure. Red dipped a spoonful of brown gravy and doused the potato, and delicately poised a fork to spear a steaming chicken-leg heaped on the platter before him. As long as he lived he would never forget that brown, fascinating, menaced member!

The eyes of Judson Miles came to rest on the male customer who sat alone. The detective gave a start of disbelief and delight. Lifting an accusing hand, he turned to poke Chief Wagner, to find him gazing soulfully at the buxom restaurant proprietor, who had just come in from the kitchen to take the cash on a dinner-check for two.

Miles had recognized those outflaring ears, exactly according to instructions. And he had observed and noted other unmistakable features and characteristics.

Red Rufus read the signs aright. He turned and plunged into the curtains over the window at his side. He crashed through the glass—and bumped into the heavy iron cross-barred grating with which the window was protected from without.

"Oh, gosh!" Red gasped. "I forgot—"

Turning with weasel-like agility, the river-pirate pitched himself clear over the table behind him, landed on all fours, bounded to his feet, dashed through the kitchen, upsetting the waiter and assistant cook, hit the rear swinging door running and vaulted the high rear fence—barbed-wire strands and all—found an alley farther back and raced for the river, with the shrill whistling of Chief Wagner in his ears.

"I gotta git! I gotta git!" Red told himself as he stepped for his beloved refuge.

Right ahead of him suddenly loomed a patrolman with a badge and carrying an automatic pistol in one hand, a night-stick in the other. This fellow began to shoot and forced Red over into the main street, where an enthusiastic crowd was swarming out for a man-hunt. They saw Red, with his head cut by the glass and bare. They knew he must be their quarry, so they dashed at him. He jumped over a low residence fence, plunged through a hallway door, went out the rear, leaving astonished

people gasping for breath, hit a low fence behind—turned to the left, and with a yelling pursuit closing in after him, he topped the levee—was shot

at as he appeared for an instant silhouetted against the sky, and shot at again as he came to the brink of the caving river-bank fifteen feet above the water's surface. With a breath of relief he darted straight out, curved over and pitching down. With his hands splitting the coiling eddies he dived deep, like an otter, feeling the jerk as his coat pockets opened and pulled back.

That didn't matter. Luck was with him; he was safe again in the bosom of Old Mississippi!



"Dad-blasted thieves!" Red cursed. "They set me up the bank! They took my boat—they robbed me!"

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. MAHNA looked across the breakfast-table on her own boat at the fair young woman called Helen Grey, who sat opposite—still, thoughtful, her mind evidently far away. The river woman started to speak, but decided on the instant not to do so. She quietly turned from the meal to put the dishes in the pan and pick up the few things which needed attention. When Helen would have assisted, Mrs. Mahna shooed her forth to the other cabin-boat alongside. There was in the young woman's mood a commanding silence.

Something, Mrs. Mahna could not surmise what, had settled on the girl's heart or soul, forcing this contemplation. Long ago, perhaps, Mrs. Mahna recalled her own similar doubts. She understood that feeling. Suddenly, Mrs. Mahna, when all the morning work was done on her own shanty-boat, decided what to do.

"I betteh be pulling out!" Mrs. Mahna declared, adding: "Yo' betteh wait here. Don't yo' go 'n' git keerless! Yo' cain't take no chances, not down ol' Mississipp'! A lady's neveh safe, understand! Same time—I betteh be movin'!"

With that Mrs. Mahna cast off the lines holding her own craft against the old-tire fenders which prevented rubbing and damage.

"Oh—you needn't go!" the young woman exclaimed. "Don't go!"

Mrs. Mahna stood with feet apart and arms akimbo, hands on waist and elbows out, pointedly. She studied the countenance opposite, weighed the expression in those bright blue eyes against the words on the friendly tongue.

"No—see yo' some'r's down the riveh!" Mrs. Mahna shook her head, and vigorously pulled her sixteen-foot long oar-sweeps, driving her hull forth into the running current. In ten minutes she was far down the crossing, still watched by the girl who leaned against the cabin staring after that departure.

"Oh, she's lovely!" Helen shook her head. "She knew—oh, I did so wish to be alone!"

Always there is something abiding deep in the heart that desires solitude. Alias Helen Grey—she called herself that, with a little laugh—brought out a comfortable cane arm-chair to sit on the bow deck. Here her anchor line led from a firm tie on an oar-pin head through a knot on the bow-bumper cleat at a gentle curve into the water with its great circular current. She looked down the river slope indefinitely into the thickening blue arch of that enormous cavern which, so it seemed, received the unimaginable flood, swallowing up Mrs. Mahna's house-boat like a chip of wood. With her departure there was no one perhaps within ten or fifteen miles. The ten square miles of sandbar, the mile breadth of river, the dense, low-land timber-brake bottom across the way—up or down the flood—no one was in sight.

"I did so want to be alone!" Helen sighed, content. "How'd you know that, old Mississippi River?"

For a time she heard no tiniest sound in answer. Then invisibly a swell heaved through the eddy, pitched the cabin hull and broke as a wave, chuckling along the sandbar.

"I didn't want to go away—I was afraid all down the Missouri—now I love it here!" she said softly. "I never thought I could do without people. Now I've let—in fact driven—Mrs. Mahna away!"

She wondered, without regret or impatience, how long she must remain thus isolated. She knew that if need be she would stay thus hidden forever—as long as she lived. She was more than willing. She did not even review in her mind the curious circumstances which had

driven her into exile and laid a reward on her discovery. She did have a moment of exasperation when she recalled the Omaha "detector" who had come looking to find her. The shadower was now somewhere with his motor-boat stolen by a river pirate—which served him right for not minding his own business!

"Really," she mused, "I'm beginning to think just like river people, indignant when any one meddles in my affairs! But I suppose he'll spread the word that I'm tripping along here. They'll be on the lookout for me. I just must keep out of sight—be careful where I go—I just mustn't let them catch me!"

The river seemed to reassure her. The sandbar was a wonderful tumult of golden dunes with wind ripples amid the water-washed reefs left by the previous high tides.

She looked over her bookcase with its five full shelves—some thirty feet of volume-backs comprising chosen literature of the world. Idly she picked out the uniform volumes and thrust them back after reading a title page or glancing down through classic paragraphs. Stories, histories, poetry, science—such things seemed greatly lacking in comparison with the enormity of her own surroundings, coupled with the incredibility of her own adventure—a dream come to reality.

"Why, I can't believe it!" she returned to stare across the waters and heaped-up sands. "I wouldn't think of it as real if I wasn't here! I didn't have a day—not an hour of warning, to be on my way. Now look where I am! In the morning secure and before night a fugitive!"

She wasn't the kind to have an escapade. Competent, cool, gifted with common-sense, untouched by longings or disappointments, still here she was as though she were a woman of the underworld, obliged to hide away, watch for detectives, distrust those who might be friendliest with her. She was even glad to be rid of Mrs. Mahna, who needed so much listening to. She need not leave this eddy for hours or days.

IN the morning, after a long, deep sleep, Helen Grey was just cooking breakfast when a hail startled her. She seemed to recognize the voice, which was alarming. She didn't want to see any one who knew her. That would mean disaster, the thing she had fled to escape! Another call and she stepped quickly to look, but well away from a window. She caught her breath with relief. That writing-person had returned!

"Good morning!" she greeted him.

"Howdy!" he exclaimed in the vernacular. "Did you see that glass-cabin cruiser going down?"

"No," she replied.

"A fisherman up the line said he saw it going north, and then in the morning he saw it coming down—"

"It could have gone by, close against that other bank." She indicated it. "Even if I'd been watching I might not have seen it. And of course in the night— You don't think you can catch him, do you? Besides, when you do find him, what'll you do?"

"Do? Do?" Wilicum repeated. "Why, I'll—uh-h—"

She laughed. Fast as he had been to overtake the scamp who had robbed him, after all what revenge could he take?

"Better stop in to breakfast," she invited. "I'm just bringing mine to a turn—coffee, chopped-up pork sausage, and the griddle hot for pancakes."

He gazed at her, squinting ever so slightly.

"Why—if you don't mind—just a moment!" He reached for his typewriter, and added, apologetically as he wrote: "I really believe you've put the maximum of data—and effect—into your invitation. Let's see—one; two—you know, you put ten facts into twenty-one words—and I

haven't counted all the inferred data, either. That's wonderful conciseness! The Bible itself is seldom so rich, and even the best poetry runs only a fact to three or four words."

A certain sternness of expression entered her eyes, despite a gay whimsicality of smile on her lips. When he paddled the bow of his skiff to the stern of the cabin-boat she reached and made its painter fast to a cleat. Then she held out a strong hand to steady him aboard her deck, still carrying his typewriter.

"I'll take that, if you please," she remarked with a finality he was obliged to obey. She carried it into the sitting-room and slammed it with considerable vigor on a magazine-stand in the far corner. Wilicum started to follow, but she turned on him, shooing him back into the kitchen-dining-room, closing the door behind her.

"I don't want the greasy sausage-smoke all over everything," she explained. "You sit down there—I'll spread some cakes on the griddle."

OBEDIENTLY he sat at the kitchen table, eyeing her with dubious expectancy. Her language was tart, her voice snappy, her activity direct. She could not have explained her pique, much less was he aware of any cause or source for her irritation—yet she showed actual resentment about something.

Never had he eaten such delicate flapjacks nor such crisp sausage. He ate with gusto even more significant than the enthusiasm of his words.

"I really must take down the recipe—" he exclaimed.

"If you do,"—she regarded him with squinting eyes,—
"I'll throw your typewriter overboard—and you too!"

"Why—uh—I—" he intermitted.

She laughed then, delightedly.

"It just bothers me to death"—she shrugged her shoulders—"you don't think of one blessed thing that you don't want to put it down in that note-book of yours!"

"Why, you see—"

"Oh, I know all about your excuse!" she assured him. "Only it seems to me you have less faith in your intellect than anyone I ever saw."

"Less faith in my mind!" he exclaimed.

"You don't trust your memory—not the least bit!"

"Why, my dear lady—I have to trust it! All my note-book can possibly hold is just suggestions—hints. All I'm hoping is that I can be reminded by my notes of the tens, hundreds, thousands of facts which I couldn't possibly write all down, or take photographs of. That makes me think—would you mind if I took some pictures of your boat and you, and so on?"

"What for?" she asked flatly.

"Why, you see—I might forget—uh-h—" he gulped. "Of course I couldn't possibly forget you!"

He stopped abruptly.

"Thought you'd said enough, didn't you?" she inquired pleasantly.

"Too much!" he acknowledged contritely. "I mean—Well, I couldn't forget you, I'm sure, if I wanted to. And I don't want to forget you."

"So you want to write all about me in your note-books, and take photographs of me as pictorial reminders?"

"I'm sorry!" He did not look at her. "There isn't much to me. I'm doing what I can with what I've got. I've done the best I knew. All I've thought about is myself—or rather, about my work. I've no right—you can take my note-book—there's quite a lot about you in it. I heard about you long before I saw you. I kept thinking if sometime I became good enough I could write you in a story. But you can take my notes and tear out every page that refers to you."

Still regarding him severely, Helen Grey sat in her chair for a time without saying a word. Her color deepened ever so little under the rich tan the river wind and sun had given her.

"That would mean losing a lot of your work," she suggested.

"Yes." He nodded. "As I told you, I'd kind of figured you'd be a good heroine."

"Just why, please?"

"Why, you're alone—and you're kind of mysterious. There's said to be a detective chasing after you. They say you can shoot mighty straight and wouldn't hesitate to shoot if you thought it necessary—and you're pretty—you talk real quick and bright—but not so much; you put a lot of meaning into few words. If I could write your eyes—"

"If you could write my eyes!" She started.

"Yes." He nodded. "But nobody could—they change like the tone of a singing bird—"

"Oh!" She caught her breath, turning away.

"I didn't mean to say anything—" he protested.

"Then I'll forgive you," she said. "If you *had* meant anything—"

He nodded.

"I suppose you're in a hurry to go catch that river-rat who robbed you?" she said presently.

"I'm going to get my boat back," he declared.

"I'm going to drop down a ways," she said. "Would you mind lifting the anchor? I'll be doing the dishes meanwhile."

"Oh, certainly!" He sprang to his feet, and having weighed the hook he started his outboard and nosed the cabin boat over into the main current. Then, with all clear up and down, he went in and wiped the dishes.

"We'll keep a good look-out," she remarked, as they sat on the bow deck. "You may see that launch somewhere along down. There are no outlets or inlets along here, except Winchester Chute, which is too shallow at this stage for the launch to go in there. Then of course there's the chute of Beef Island—"

"I saw a fisherman who runs nets in Beef Island Chute. He said there wasn't any launch in there this morning when he came through."

"Mrs. Mahna said you wrote all she said, too," Helen Grey remarked irrelevantly.

"I tried to, but I keep remembering things yet," he admitted frankly. "You have to go some to keep up with a tongue like hers."

WHAT started you down the Mississippi, anyhow?" she asked.

"I could do it cheap," he answered. "I had about all the outfit. I could get a boat for fifty dollars or so—I paid forty dollars for that one, second-hand. I had always wanted to write for newspapers, on account of my uncle being a star reporter. I kept trying, even when I was just going to school. The hardest thing I ever tried to learn was grammar and rhetoric, though."

"Then I was a reporter. I lasted about two months on the first paper. I worked about five months on another. I went to Chicago and my uncle fixed it so I was there two years. I know they kept me just on his account. I know I was awful—I butchered everything. I wanted to do it right—but I couldn't. One day something in me said I'd failed. I wasn't worth even twenty dollars a week. I went and told my uncle about it. All my family despised me, because they didn't like newspaper work—my uncle was my mother's brother, not one of the Smiths. My mother always thought the way my father and his people did, too."

CHAPTER IX

"You go somewhere and write down everything you see, hear, and can learn in any way," Uncle Ed told me. "They say over on the copy-desk you can write, but you don't know *what* to write. If you keep a note-book and put everything down, there's a chance you can be an author."

"Well, I'd been going from bad to worse. First I started out to be a newspaperman. Then I'd dreamed about writing biographies and histories. Then I had the fiction notion. I wouldn't be surprised any day if I began to count syllables and broke into verses."

"Progressive, just like heart trouble, isn't it?" she inquired.

"Same thing," he admitted. "The Mississippi was handiest, so I came this way. Like Ruskin says, it's *multitudinous*—"

"You've read Emerson, I suppose?" she interrupted him. "And Thoreau too?"

"Lots."

"Spencer?"

"No."

"Then there may be some hope for you—not much, of course!" She shook her head, and he looked up at her, rather startled. She was gazing at him, sighing lugubriously.

"Oh, it doesn't matter!" he declared stoutly. "I don't amount to anything—never will! Nobody'll miss me—dubs never matter—"

"You've enjoyed writing your notes?" she asked.

"Oh—you've no idea what it's meant!"

"Well, I'll let you take your typewriter, now," she said. "I know you're just starving to catch up with your notes, before you forget them!"

He just looked at her for so long that she fidgeted. Then he shook his head.

"No," he replied, "all I talked about was myself—all I saw was you, and you're going to tear out my notes about you."

"Really—you'd let me do that?"

"Yes."

"I'll have to read the notes first," she said. "I'll begin now—"

"But—" He sat aghast. "I put down *everything*—"

"So much the better," she laughed.

"I mean things—"

"I know what you mean," she interrupted, "—things private, things not fit to be read, things sorry, shameful and significant. I'm sure I'll find them entertaining, even though they make me blush."

"Suppose you think I need—well—killing!" he said.

"Most men need that," she assured him, adding: "Only the mercy of women reluctant to do their duty has prevented wholesale slaughter long before this!"

And with that she took the letter-size loose-leaf holder, and sitting at her ease turned to the first page.

"You watch the boats," she ordered. "If this stuff is interesting I'd hate to be shipwrecked in the midst of it!"

Travers Wilicum fled to the skiff, to keep the cabin-boat straight.

WITH wonderful presence of mind Detective Judson Miles headed down the street toward New Madrid eddy, immediately the river-pirate had made his escape. Chief Kinney Wagner rushed out the front door of the restaurant and stood in the middle of the sidewalk blowing his whistle to give the alarm. The sawmill night-shift suspected something, hearing that shrill blast, and somebody hung himself on the boiler-whistle, filling the bottoms with the heavy vibrations.

The several municipal policemen with excited volunteers gave chase to the little rascal who was cornered, but escaped by dodging around till he dived into the Mississippi current just beyond the levee. Miles arrived at the fish-dock stairs and glanced at the line of shanty-boats along the eddy bank up-stream. Sure enough! Twelve boats up he discovered his glass-cabin

launch with a bow-line to a stake up the bank, and an anchor line off the stern, swinging the craft between them. From the bow deck swung a long plank with a hole bored through each end, and a rope knotted in each hole. One rope was tied to a deck cleat, the other to a stake driven in the bank.

With a glad cry Miles went aboard and turned a pocket flash on the interior. Then he turned on a battery



"I never ate nicer beef," he exclaimed. "Where'd you get it?" Her face set angrily. "None of your damned business!" she ejaculated.

cabin light. Little had been taken, so far as he could see. His firearms were lying negligently around, as though the pirate had used them. His own bunk and the other bunk were in a state of disorder. A strong odor of fried onions permeated the cabin. The cupboard contained a good deal of wild game and the detective noted that there were articles of feminine apparel here and there.

Chief Wagner arrived presently at the river-bank, and shook hands with Miles at his good fortune in recovering the motorboat. Quite a crowd had gathered.

One couple came along, the man wearing corduroys and a woolen shirt with a broad-brimmed hat, and the woman dressed in walking clothes, including laced boots, and a gray wide-brimmed hat. They stood around a while listening, not saying anything; then they went along up the river-bank. They went beyond the shanty-boat town and some distance above found a skiff with a few articles of outfit in it. At sight of that craft they ran down to examine it closely in the gloom.

"That accounts for it!" the man mused glumly. "That river rat we traded this skiff with for his cruiser came to town looking for us. Then when he was up to the restaurant, where we saw him, that detective we read about in the paper recognized him. The cruiser belonged to the man from Omaha. Anyhow, we got our skiff back. That's nice, isn't it?"

"Very!" his companion remarked tartly. "It's just as

you said: tripping Old Mississipp' is an unending series of surprises and adventures!"

"Well, that's what we wanted, wasn't it?"

"Unquestionably!"

"Shall we continue our cruise?" he inquired.

"Of course—not for worlds would I quit now!"

And with that they boarded the skiff and casting off, floated up the reverse current and rowed forth well onto the river, dropping by New Madrid's electric-lighted domain, invisible but seeing. They could hear the babble of excitement from the crowd at the foot of the main street, where the steamboats land and the floating fish-dock lies. The woman reached to seize her companion's hand in both her own.

"Oh, Mingo!" she exclaimed, "I wouldn't have missed this for worlds!"

Whereupon he chuckled with masculine satisfaction.

"You're a good sport!" he observed approvingly, and he embraced her fondly.

They could see the Chief of Police, with his uniform, and the detective on the fish-dock to which he had moved his launch. The man from Omaha was explaining how it all happened, as he examined a woman's apron minutely in search of clues.

A warm glow of satisfaction suffused Miles. He had not lost sight of his main objective, yet he had accumulated a good deal of evidence which might sometime prove useful when his scope had broadened and his interests widened. He was matching his wits against a beautiful woman of mystery. Than that, nothing could be more exhilarating. Feminine intuition against masculine logical reasoning—that was joining issues! Having followed blind leads, been thrown off the trail, met rebuffs, and even suffered the vengeance of at least one river-pirate, quick wit and instantaneous action had recovered the cruising launch, none the worse for wear. He felt he was letting nothing escape him.

A slight doubt as to his technique had crept into his mind, however. He had frankly told who he was and whither he was bound, declaring his business to all. He was looking for a certain girl on whose discovery was a substantial reward. He wondered if it could be that she had found pals and allies down the river? If she were merely a "missing," of course there could be no reason for a detective covering himself up. But if she was criminal, especially secretly so, it might be advisable for him also to work on the quiet, keeping his real object dark. Every good detective must be master of both methods of operating. Of course, under-cover work is much more attractive, demanding the utmost of finesse.

"I think I'd better be just a sport, now," he mused. "Kind of a lively fellow, looking for a good time, doing shooting—just tripping for the fun of it!"

Off the sandbar at Point Pleasant he noticed a dirty brown shanty-boat, and debonairly headed to round up casually alongside. As he slowed into the reverse eddy, a young woman emerged and smiled.

"Howdy," she greeted cheerily. "What's on your mind, big boy?"

MILES smiled expansively. He noted her blue eyes, fair complexion, and tousled auburn hair and tried definitely to connect her with that patron who had come to his lunchroom so long before. A certain indistinctness of memory was natural, but she checked up approximately according to the reward notice. Detective Judson Miles had never known quite such an exultant moment. Her ears were white, hidden partly by bobbed hair—pearly!

"Not so much," he replied as the young woman began to bristle under his cool survey. "How's tricks?"

"Oh, so-so!" she replied airily.

And thus in an easy, ingratiating manner, naturally sustained, the detective proceeded to terms of acquaintance and trustfulness. He learned that she was going under the name of Edna Lee, having come out of the Ohio back in October, dropping down right slow on account of the cotton-crop picking hanging over late. She was just cooking dinner; if he was hungry, he'd better come in and set by the fire, where he'd be warm.

"I've some extras," he remarked, in the river way; "a can of plum pudding, which you can put in boiling water before opening. I've a pound or two of wild comb-honey—and some chocolate creams—"

"Oh-h, how fine!" she cried. "Chocolate candy!"

"You bet!" he declared, bringing out the fancy box to prove it.

The way she pitched into the coated square caramels proved how starved she was for just those particular sweets. Detective Miles stood awed by his own foresight. He had figured that when he found his quarry a box of first-class chocolates would be a good second lead—now look at it! It just did seem to him that detective inspiration must be a gift. She rolled her eyes at him with complete lack of suspicion. She fed him great chunks of delicious tender pot-roast of beef, and covered his hot biscuits with smooth brown gravy.

"I never ate nicer beef," he exclaimed. "Where'd you get it?"

On the instant she froze. Lines on her face set angrily. Her eyes narrowed. She lifted her red lips in an expression of rebuff.

"None of your damned business!" she ejaculated.

INSTANTLY he knew that he had made a bad break. Hastily he coned his memory of the various installments of his course, and caught the flash keynote he needed. His marvelous instructors had foreseen exactly this emergency.

"If through mischance your lead proves maladroit, instantly do nothing—but not too slowly, and not too quickly, let it be known that you are innocent of any desire to hurt any one's feelings. Be guileless and cover your break with an assumption of frankness. *Cover up*. If necessary, apologize frankly."

"I beg your pardon!" he said seriously. "I just meant this meat's delicious. You see, I'm a stranger on the river—"

"I saw you was." She relaxed. "That's why I called you sharp. You see if you asked that on some boats, they'd be really mad. I come by this meat perfectly honest. A friend give it to me. But you can see if I'd driven it into deep water off'n a sandbar—you know what I mean!—why, naturally it wouldn't have been none of your business, an' I'd 'a' been hot."

"Perfectly right, too!" he assured her. "I'm awf'ly glad you let me know about that."

"Up-the-bankers are always asking fool questions." She shook her head. "Wouldn't you think they'd learn manners, sometimes? I don't mean you, because I can see you're a perfect gentleman, but out of your own set. You'll catch on real fast, I expect. But some people never do. You got a nice cruiser theh!"

"Oh, yes—I bought it to Omaha."

"Bought it—uh?" She looked at him.

"Why, of course!"

"But I heard somebody say— Who the Hades are you, anyhow?"

"Why, Judson Miles!" he replied, before he thought.

"Well, that's rich!" She laughed aloud. "So you're the detector, aint you? Honest, you had me buffaloed for

a minute! But it's all right. You wouldn't try to fool a lady, would you? And you got your boat back!"

CHAPTER X

ALIAS Helen Grey regarded herself with some dismay and much astonishment. Some mood due to her own situation, opportune on the wide Mississippi, had led to a quite impossible situation. When just at dusk they arrived near the foot of New Madrid eddy, Wilicum had driven her cabin-boat across the reverse current against the bank, and there she was moored. Alongside, fended off by automobile-tires, was the note-book keeper's skiff, with the two hoods up.

On going uptown to the post office Wilicum found some mail. He had brought it down to the cabin-boat.

"Look!" he said, in a low voice.

She found herself examining a seventy-dollar check. It was made out to Joseph Howard Smith. She noted a number of identification features. The way she held and scrutinized the slip of paper was practiced, professional—set by habit.

"Well?" she inquired.

"I wrote an article about the Mississippi River!" he breathed. "That's the pay—including photographs."

"A story?"

"Not fiction—just a description!" His voice was low but ringing. "I never dreamed—"

"You needn't worry!"—and she smiled. "Nobody down here'll cash it for you."

"I'll deposit it in the bank—then have them telephone at my expense—and have identification waived."

"That'll do!"

"And then—we'll celebrate!" he exploded.

"Let me treat you to a preliminary congratulatory dinner!" she said with such an air of finality that even had he wished he could not have refused. He marveled at her decisiveness of command. She had an executive manner of authority, brooking no denial.

Accordingly, they ate chicken uptown that night. Wilicum was surprised to find himself called by his river name in the Arkansaw Traveler restaurant. He recalled having seen the glass-cabin detective cruiser. Moreover, he was delighted by the episode of the attempt to capture the pirate, whom he had not noticed on entering, but in the glimpse he had as the fellow dashed away he was positive in his identification. He could use that scoundrel in fiction sometime!

Having lingered a long time over the chicken, the two returned to the river where they heard many remarks and saw much excitement on account of the escape of the river pirate. There was some speculation as to whether the rascal had been drowned or not. When they came to the white cabin-boat with the skiff alongside, alias Helen Grey said:

"I wonder if you would think I am imposing on you if I ask you to run me out into the river to float on down tonight?"

"Why, anything you wish!" he agreed.

"Then if you'd rather not travel in the dark you could run back into the eddy," she added.

"And leave you out there—alone?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"I said, if you would *rather*," she reminded him.

"Why—what I'd rather to do is—uh-h—"

"Thank you," she said gently. "Cast off the lines, please. Then reverse your outboard—with the eddy current it'll be a bit of seamanship to clear those boats up the eddy."

He pulled forward the stern hood on his skiff, clearing the outboard. He cast off the lines and then hauled in the anchor over the stern, while the outboard picked up the headway and increased it.

"Nicely done, engineer!" she praised him as they swung into the current, heading out into the main river.

"I'll navigate, if you wish to retire," he remarked.

"But I don't want to," she assured him. "I love the river night! It envelopes one so—the dark is the refuge of the runaways and the hiding. Since I started down the Mississippi—better get your typewriter!—I find myself greatly changed. When I used to see accounts in the newspapers of efforts to find criminals, of tracking fugitives from justice, they made me feel—oh, I don't know—crawly! It never occurred to me that sometime I'd be hiding away down here. It all seemed so vulgar!"

"I used to think of having a great library, with hundreds, thousands of feet of shelves filled with original sources," he added his own surprise at life's vagaries, "and here I am, living in a little skiff—"

"Gathering first-hand information of your own!" she portrayed him.

"Yes—I started disappointed, hiding defeat in my own heart," he told her. "Now, the river seems to be taking me out of the turmoils of disaster through a gateway into some garden of Elysia."

"The leaves of which are fluttering checks, rewards of toil with undivided interests?" she inquired.

"What a whimsical fancy!" he agreed. "The trees of Inspiration's Wilderness letting fly those colorful certificates—the tokens of worldly appreciation!"

Each grew silent, thoughtful. Wisps of varying breeze brushed against their warm cheeks. Fate was playing a pretty game with them—the most stupid in the world must have recognized the fact—and they were not stupid.

HE had written three hundred pages, mostly single-space, keeping strict account of every river detail. Thus he had grown aware almost unconsciously of the deep, abiding Spirit of the River—the strange unity which mingled at the Ohio Forks the falling rains of the far Appalachians with the melted snows from the Continental Divide, and which had brought him inevitably down to Point Pleasant crossing, here on the way into Merriwether's Bend, guarding this rare river lady. He could but long to know what thoughts were hers. Surely they would not be commonplace—nothing could be ordinary in this extraordinary gloom of the Mississippi night.

"That must be Tiptonville." She indicated a village toward the east. "We needn't go any farther. The Commission maps show some bays in these sandbars along here—the left bank's nearest—"

He started the outboard and straightened out the cabin-boat to edge across the current into the low east-shore eddies.

"A little lower down!" she directed, and then: "Around that point. . . All right, swing up, now! Set your course by the North Star! Ease!"

He stopped the motor and returned to the cabin-boat bow deck. He stood for a minute or two while the boats lost their headway. They disturbed a flock of sleeping mallards which swarmed away with much splashing and protesting quacks. He let fall her anchor, which went into about five feet of water, no more. With fifteen or eighteen feet of line out, he snubbed against the bow-bumper cleat, making fast to the right oar head.

Alias Helen Grey had entered the cabin, pulled down the curtains and lighted a gasoline table lamp.

"Won't you come in a while?" she invited.

"Why,"—he looked at the odd pyramid clock on top

of her bookcase—"it's after eleven o'clock—it's pretty late!"

"That's so—it is, isn't it!" she expressed her surprise—coming out on the deck again, and closing the door so the bright lamp would not so much blind their eyes.

The sandbar was very beautiful, sparkling under the reflections of innumerable stars.

"You don't know what it means to me," he said. "This!"

"You've a very low opinion of the intuition of women, haven't you?"

"Why, no!" He shook his head. "I just meant the splendor—the adventure—the being trusted!"

"Being trusted?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"You think I don't know—that?"

"Well—" He hesitated.

"Run along!" She gave him a little push. "It's getting late!"

Obediently he went aboard his skiff, snugged down his hoods all around, and wrote for half an hour before he switched off his six-volt battery globe. Presently, dozing, he was startled by hearing what sounded like a chuckle; but he couldn't be certain. There are so many unusual and strange sounds down old Mississippi that it isn't always feasible to identify them. It might have been the fall of a ripple breaking on the sand—and again it might have been on board the cabin-boat alongside. A man never knows!

The stars had been shining at midnight. At daybreak a misting rain was falling through wisps and streamers of drifting fog. One could not see fifty yards in such a storm as that.

Wilicum was surprised at hearing the downpour on his taut waterproofed canvas hoods, but he was soon asleep again, only to be awakened by a familiar voice:

"Are you going to sleep all day, too?"

"No, indeed!" he replied, and found on emerging that breakfast was ready.

"But I ought to supply some of it!" he declared.

"You can go over to Tiptonville and deposit your check in the bank," she said. "When they give you the cash you can talk about that."

He nodded, embarrassed—how had she known he was penniless? She remained on board the cabin-boat while he headed across the sandbars, as over a Colorado valley desert, going into town. In the Reelfoot Bank Wilicum told the cashier his predicament and asked to have the check put through as quickly as possible so he could have the money.

"Who are you?" the banker inquired. He said his name was Smith, and gave the details of his trip down the Mississippi for literary purposes.

"Come back in two or three days," said the cashier, and the tripper returned to the boats.

He found Helen Grey dressed in laced boots and jaunty walking-suit, waiting to stroll over the dunes. Taking a rifle, they wandered in the loose golden yellow hills and hollows of sand, sometimes on the ridge backs, and again following along the dark edge of the water.

Rain poured in fine drops. The wind rose in gusts, carrying fog strands hither and yon. The storm washed the loose particles of sand in the scuffings where rabbits, birds and raccoons had wandered on the wastes. Protected by wide-brimmed hats and waterproofs from the



"I've heard of men showing signs of almost human intelligence." "No doubt you inspired them," he remarked.

rain's inclemencies, the two strolled along, singing snatches of operas and folk-tunes. Helen Grey paused to cry:

*I am the daughter of earth and water
And nursling of the sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and the shores
I change but never die!*

Whereupon her companion responded:

*Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart—"*

"What's that?" she demanded. "You know *The Skylark*?"

"I know lots of things," he confessed immodestly. "Some men do."

"Now I wonder!" she reflected aloud, adding maliciously: "I've heard of men showing signs of almost human intelligence."

"No doubt you inspired them," he remarked. "Women are wine."

"Mr. Man"—she spoke with a tang—"imagine prohibition grape-juice insulted by being called an alcoholic beverage!"

"Alas!" he mourned, "the sum of my talents is a balanced or progressive arrangement of facts. Lacking more than trivial fancy and no inspiration, please, dear lady, don't expect too much of me."

She surveyed him doubtfully.

"Are you as dumb as you seem, or is that a pose?" she demanded.

"Who poses but the stupid?" he inquired. "Really, I feel trivial beside you. You know all I do."

"Is that all?" she asked, sighing.

"I don't know." He shook his head. "My soul worries about my brain."

"Envious?"

"No, I'd never be that; just wistful, I guess."

"Oh!" She bit her lip at his sincerity.

"I'm just not much," he crowded his advantage. "I don't know who you are, but obviously down the river you are repeating."

"Repeating what?"

"Your authority," he said. "Your manner of speaking, your bearing, the looming of domination in your personality. You must have been an important superior in your former—er—occupational incarnation."

"And some have regarded you as 'plumb innocent!'" she commented.

"Here on the river they talk that way." And he grinned. "To tell the literal truth, I don't know what *innocence* means."

"Unless you are naïve, that's innocence sublime!" she suggested.

"Does it really matter?" he inquired suddenly.

"Very much, indeed," she replied. "The innocence of ignorance doesn't amount to much. Accidental integrity is of hazardous importance. But the virtue of wisdom is supremely important. I'm wondering just—"

"Just which mine is?" he asked, slyly, and then intoned sonorously:

*"To aid thy mind's development—to watch
Thy dawn of little joys—to sit and see
Almost thy very growth, to view thee catch
Knowledge of objects—wonders yet to thee—"*

"How in the world did you know that?" She started back amazed.

"It's a gift!" he seized his turn to mock playfully.

"I'll say it must be—to quote out of my mind *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*! I didn't say a thing!"

"But you thought it."

She shook her head.

"I don't believe it! It just happened that you—"

"That's all!" he consoled her with assurance. "Anything can come by chance down old Mississipp', even mind-reading."

She drew away from him in the pouring mist, watching him over her shoulder in some real alarm. It was one thing to make rather free and easy with some one who isn't extra bright—quite another to discover the scoundrel is a mind-reader, pretending! And yet a shade of doubt remained.

"You're educated," she remarked flatly.

"Oh, yes—too much! That's what ails me—all my originality crushed so that I shall never be able to do things in my own way—"

"Nonsense!"

"When I try to write fiction, immediately before my mind rises the huge compulsory genius of Professor Baldy Euling, leveling his long finger at me, crying, 'To obtain *that* effect do it *so*!' Thus it is done."

"I always did things some other way than the one they told me," she laughed.

"You would," he assented.

"How so?"

"Being feminine," he answered, which she found an exceedingly unsatisfactory reply, till he added belatedly, "and being you, both."

"Except where you quoted I've found not one line in your notes which could be ascribed to lack of originality," she demurred.

"THAT'S one reason I came down the Mississippi," he admitted. "I just didn't know a thing about it, except that Joliet discovered it, that La Salle explored it, and that its basin contains a million square miles. The moment I began to put down such expressions as jump-lines, caving banks, horseshoe bends, Old River, reaches, crossings, dead eddies, bayous and shanty-boaters, I was swimming by myself far beyond old Baldy Euling's depths and widths. I was no longer in classic literature; I was hog-wallowing in colloquialism without authoritative precedent—"

"Mark Twain!" she rebuked him.

"I wasn't bragging." He nodded meekly. "Except for the unique *Huckleberry Finn* his viewpoint was not the shanty-boat, but the pilot-house of a steam packet. He called us all flat-boaters—"

"Then you've fixed on river atmosphere for your specialty?"

"Oh, well—I just figure I can climb out of the Mississippi up to the levels of realism without feeling I'm descending from critical heights. Contemplation of a great phenomenon may expand the mind."

"Perhaps I know what you mean," she mused. "Assuredly, starting down the Missouri as a river-rat, I didn't anticipate finding myself discussing literature with an author!"

"A literary odd-jobber, rather." He shook his head sadly. "No telling what you'll find down here! I've listed occupational data; fishermen and market-hunters, store-boats and junkers, show-boats, concert-boats and bum-boats of entertainment, pillow- and hat-feather killers, graduate physicians, missionaries, a lot of photographers, artists and behaviorists, drifters catching flotsam plunder, a whole profession of river control, loggers and rafters, shiners and whisky-boaters, pirates, authors and newspaper special writers, grafters—"

"You did not mention fugitives," she suggested.

"Wouldn't that include all of us?" he inquired. "I ran away from failure's hurts, from commonplaces of convention's rigid etiquette—"

"And I for a woman's reason." She laughed, a little wryly.

ON returning to the boats, they were surprised to find they had spent most of the day wandering in discussion over the mist-swept sandbar dunes. Together they prepared a late dinner from game and vegetables out of their grub-boxes. Sitting at the table, the shifting of breeze and current gave them panorama views of river and banks.

"Could anything be more wildly beautiful?" he asked with a sigh of appreciation.

"I wonder!" She leaned back. "I'm surprised to find in me an unconventional disregard of appearances," she observed.

"The environment is so novel and untamed," he said, "that the normal rules do not seem to apply here. Land- and town-people float alone in wild bends, depending wholly on their own resources of skill and effort. In spite of ourselves, we are running wild, if that's what you mean."

"Exactly that," she assented. "At first I was dreadfully afraid. I hated my predicament! I couldn't see why I should have to endure it. Then I sneaked past St. Louis, not stopping at all. One morning I floated through at the Grand Tower. The world of carelessness just opened before me like folding doors. I was always a busybody—home, school, and then business. Overnight and utterly unexpectedly I had to flee—not on my own account—and just running away, I left behind everything that I ever was."

"Even to hiding out among the sandbars with a habitual note-maker."

"I should despise you if you were less," she told him, and with lowering brows, added: "I'd kill you if you were—became—more!"

"Any man who disappoints a woman needs killing," he assured her.

"You do understand!" she breathed. "And the river people—"

"Laughed at me, calling me a fool?" He chuckled.

"Well, I may be, at that. I keep wondering. You've given me a privilege—"

"Unbelievable!"

"I just dote on fairy stories," he said.

"All my life I've dreamed them!" She shook her head. "I never did expect to live in romantic drama."

"The lower Mississippi is a land of enchantment," he reminded her. "If you float into it with brave heart and great purpose, ready to ride any storm of emergency plumb sure of a protecting talisman, I'm sure there's no disappointment."

"It must be true! It *is* true!" she declared emphatically. "But you know—I'm that Adeline Laura Bonney the detective asked you about in the restaurant?"

"You needn't have told me."

"I had to let you know—I've been so used to crowds, to work—living—I've been so lonely. They'll hunt me everywhere—you see that, even on the Mississippi! And I want you to know it."

"Fair lady,"—he bowed,—"*unto thee I offer myself, such as I am, such good will and powers to take as needs ye must—the rest to discard. I ask no greater boon than the privilege of standing at thy beck and call. I could know no deeper despondency than thy ill-favor. What thy wish is that must be my command. To stand between you and all bitter winds—that should be my reward. Thy regard hath raised one beneath contempt to an eminence beyond all dreams and hopes of worthiness. Ah, I thank thee from a heart filled to overflowing!*"

"Your manner is one of jest, sir!" she rebuked him. "And yet methinks beneath thy gay burlesque there lie unfathomable depths of sincerity. I had need of thee, and, lo, a genius appears—"

"To offer all that he hath in honor to give!"

She smiled, but not lightly nor in mockery. She was no wasteful woman, cheapening herself. Having need of a strange champion, somehow Old Mississipp' had by a quirk been in a mood to grant her an odd, quixotic adventurer, one who made a great oath with jubilant gayety, by self-abnegation, and excusably having a certain definiteness of professional purpose.

"In return I should like, somehow, to help you!" she said.

"You could give me no more useful assistance than the friendship I have had," he answered. "I begin to realize I'm quite impossibly egotistic and pessimistic. Your example and good humor are great antidotes."

"Then as long as this lasts we may as well unite our respective fortunes," she laughed. "Only I warn you the risk you run is by far the greater—"

"I'm not sure!"

"For one thing I've no reputation to lose—"

"And I only the hope of one yet to be made!"

"Two nonentities in the most fortuitous circumstances imaginable!" she closed the debate in understanding. "Now please read something to me!"

CHAPTER XI

RED RUFUS swam under water with long, frog-like strokes as far as he could hold his breath, then turned upward to break the surface as gently as the lazy roll of a brook trout sucking May-flies under without eating them. Looking around Red could see his New Madrid pursuers coming as near the edge of the overhanging caving bank as they dared, now and then one or another shooting wild at the shimmering silvery night-surface of the Mississippi—the bullets splashing far upstream from where the current had carried the pirate.

"My land!" he grunted. "I was lucky! They had me sho' 'nough cornered—yes, indeed!"

For a time he watched the human silhouettes against the white dome of light; then he looked down the stream, reaching with his long arms and large hands toward his future in that direction. All was dark but for the Government Channel lights on top of the banks, marks for steamboat pilots to steer by.

"I don't know which side I'd better land at," he mused to himself. "If I drop down Point Pleasant crossing, the current'll carry me over toward Tiptonville. Course, I don't want to land theh—an' hit's right smart further down to Reelfoot. If a feller lands on the same side he's been chased off from, course that's taking a chanct too. Prob'ly I'd better jes' tread water for a while."

Thus he consigned himself to the whimsey of the Mississippi current. Where it carried him, he would go, without resistance. And then a lightwood tree which had caved off circled near him.

"That's lucky!" he grinned, seeing the network of branches at one end and the high-flung roots at the other, standing against the gray sky.

HE crawled out on the big log, only to find himself shivering in the wind. The water had been cold, but the air was colder. Soon he was shuddering, his teeth chattering audibly. He took off his clothes to wring them as dry as he could. When he crawled into them again he slapped himself violently with his arms. He started to pace back and forth along the log, and thus discovered at the top end of the trunk a hole from which a huge branch had broken away in decay. At this discovery he reached down into the hollow, feeling about.

"Why, sho!" he laughed aloud. "Hit's hollow an' hit's dry! My lan', now aint that lucky?"

Thereupon he went into the hole feet-first and having broken down sundry elements of decayed wood, crumbled many loose fibers and arranged a chunk for his pillow, he wriggled into comfort, the hole warmed by his own breath. "*Hue-e-e!*" he breathed, like a pig going to sleep. "Hit's sho' plumb comfort!"

He was awakened, presently, by a misty rain coming into the hollow, but he need only crawl a little deeper into his refuge to avoid this. Daylight came apace, but he was asleep. A slight jar brought him out of his hole, looking around like a squirrel or a 'coon. His snag had swung out of the main current into an eddy and a branch of root or top had hooked into the shallow bottom. Pouring rain and a dim mist gave him view of only acres of water in all directions but one. In that he could see the edge of a bar along which the swells from the river dragged in a ceaseless procession of ripple-breakers in miniature.

"Aint nothing I can do while it rains!" he grumbled. "I can swim ashore, travel and starve, or I can snooze here and starve. I aint in no hurry. I aint had all my sleep lately, anyhow!"

Accordingly he withdrew into the tree-trunk to sleep again. He was awakened with startling suddenness by a throbbing vibration running through his refuge. He did not move as he listened, putting his head against a hard spot of wood to get the measure of the sounds coming through the water.

"Motor-boat!" he identified. "Small propeller, going fast—"

He rolled his eyes to look out of the hole in the tree. He heard an odd, splashy, fluttering, coming nearer, accompanied by low, warning "quacks," from a flock of ducks moving across an eddy, reluctant after a long flight to take to their wings again. Cautiously Red crept to the break in the tree-trunk, the better to hear. As he did

so he heard the birds right at hand. One crept up on the log to flop over, a fat young canvasback which was too lazy to go around. For an instant it poised on the edge of the hollow. Red snatched and grabbed the bird by the neck to drag it down, crimping the bone with a single snap.

"Now that's the first time I eveh done that!" he chuckled.

The next instant there was a sound of repeating gunfire and fine shot showered hissing through the air above the log, a few bullets snapping into it. Red dodged deep for refuge, waiting. He heard the thumps as four birds fell while the impact of many wings shook the water, making the log itself quiver.

"He's a good shot, that shot!" Red read the signs. "He's no soft-paw—he's killed birds before! Only one feller shooting. That's a launch. If I knowed he was all right, I could get set up the bank without swimming!"

He heard the boat coming, its cutwater splitting the surface as the motor slowed down. The reverse gear shook the eddy in the vigor of setting the propeller back. As the hunter was busy picking up his game, Red ventured to take a cursory glance between cracks in the hollow splinters.

"Shu-u!" he gasped. "That young lady can sure shoot! I'm glad I didn't chance that she couldn't—or wouldn't! I was lucky! An' that hist'ry-feller's with her! I oughta knowed that wa'n't no reg'lar motor-boat, but an outboard—sounded different, but I neveh noticed. They's drappin' down togetheh. Women are doggone funny! She run me back into the brake—an' I know the riveh! She'd ruther have a doggone soft-paw, some blamed numbskull! What's the use of a feller knowin' anything, anyhow? Theh I'd 'a' gone with her, an' took cyar of her handsome—an' look what she's took up with! Huh! Well, I reckon she figured she could do the managin' herse'f. She can sure shoot—six birds with five shots! If it was some strangeh I could get set up the bank, but I wouldn't ask that woman to shoot an' put me outa my misery! She'd prob'ly do *that*. My lan'! I was lucky she didn't notice me grab that duck I did. She'd sure thought somethin', seein' hit pop under! One cons'lation, they didn't anchor—they've kept right on going. It's an awful good day for gittin' ducks—I must be some'r's down to'd the foot of a bar, them canvasbacks bein' along here. Well, theh they go ag'in!"

The outboard on the soft-paw's skiff throbbed again with muffled cutout, and the skiff gathered headway in the slowly circling mists.

"They got bresh on the bows!" Red observed. "That's a good riveh trick! Wondeh where's her red-trimmed white shanty-boat? Why—I bet they're lodged in here some'r's! That's so; I'm on the east side of Old Mississippi! I don't recognize that sandbar—*Sh-h-h!*"

He admonished himself to be quiet and listen.

"Doggone!" he choked. "That's a cotton-gin—theh's anotheh! Theh's three—I neveh noticed them whining at all! Three cotton-gins—and one's a roll-presser. Theh's two old steam-press balers! Le's see—uh-h—why, plague take hit, this must be Tiptonville! Aint I no further down 'n' Tiptonville? Fifteen-twenty miles! Why, dad-blast the luck! I must of been circling around in this eddy eight-ten hours 'fore I hooked to the bottom! An' I reckoned I'd be down Plum Point Reach, or in above Osceola b'low Caruthersville, anyhow! Aint that luck!"

He sat like an Eskimo in a kyak, giving the river mists baleful and indignant glances. Instead of floating forty-five miles he had come perhaps fifteen. The uncertainties of river navigation were again forcibly brought to the river-rat's attention. He might have known not to expect what he figured was going to happen. It was all as plain as could be, now. That history-writing fellow and the mystery lady who had come down from Omaha were

anchored or banked there in the Tiptonville sand- and willow-bar chutes or bays. They'd taken advantage of the foggy rain to kill a few ducks.

"Tiptonville's a nice town to work, if they don't catch you," Red mused, "but I don't know what them two wants to stop here for fer any length of time. Course, they aint grafters. He's awful innocent, but she makes up for him, the way she can shoot. 'Sociatin' with her, a feller can't take no such long chances with him from now on, neither. She aint no common up-the-banker, foolish but



"Boss, I found this duck theh in the cotton! How come?"

int'restin'. My lan'! I'd like to get that skiff. I'd oughta took it, an' dumped him in the riveh when I had the chancet! That makes me think!"

He brought out the watch he had picked from Travers Wilicum on the night he ransacked the soft-paw's boat. He held it to his ear, then stared in astonishment at the face, watching the second hand circling merrily around.

"Waterproof!" he gasped. "Now aint I lucky? They aint one watch in a thousand yo' can swim with an' it don't choke up. But I got that one. Kind of a cheap silver-looking case—but hit's waterproof! Gitting to'd night. I'm all dry now—an' that water looks cold. Them two'll be dressin' ducks for supper, d'rectly. I bet that lady can cook too; that kind always can. They know ev'rything. They can shoot, fish, fight, run a motor, pull a boat, an' all them things. They don't stand for no nonsense, though—but if a feller can only fool 'em, he's fixed for life! Writin' hist'ries must be an awful good racket, if theh's any graft in it—theh must be sunthin', or that woman wouldn't 'a' took up with such a no-count ornery as that feller. He don't know nothin' but what somebody tells him an' he has to write hit down so's he won't forget hit! Made me feel funny seein' 'im grab ev'ry blamed word I said. That otheh writin'-feller who used to kill me ev'ry Riveh story he writ, he trusted to mem'ry till afteh I

rolled 'im an' come away. Writin'-fellers must all have kinda weak minds anyhow. Both them I got intimate with had, that's sure! . . . No use my goin' out in this rain! I betteh crawl in ag'in. Tomorrow'll do as well as today, and prob'ly the sun'll be out to dry me off. My lan'! I'm lucky! I've slept in holler trees up the bank, lots of times, but I aint neveh floated down old Mississipp' in a dry one before."

On the following day the downpour was still falling steadily, with a chill wind behind it, however. Hungry, uneasy, Red Rufus stuck his head out of his hollow snag, to find that during the night the storm had changed from cold rain to sleet, every drop splashing where it struck and making an oozy pit that resembled a crater in the moon. Every surface was covered with a thin coating of ice, which increased in thickness with each fall of the mists.

Red Rufus shuddered with anticipatory chills. Of all the disagreeable things he knew as a vagabond without shelter, a sleet-storm was the roughest. His hollow log was better than the open, even after two days and two nights without food. If worse came to worst he could eat his canvasback duck raw. He wasn't quite hungry enough for that, however. Perhaps he'd get a chance somewhere to cook it.

The wind blew gustily hither and yon, showering the rain down like charges of shot. As he lived, never had he heard a meaner sound. He dozed by sheer will-power; for once, he was all slept out. . . . He was still asleep when suddenly, all senses alert, he felt something. He popped forth to look around.

NIGHT had fallen again. The sleet still rattled and hissed as it fell. Wisps of fog moved in the gloom. The river water had grown a good deal colder, coming from a heavy freeze across Illinois, Ohio, northern Missouri and up there, chilling the great rivers. Glancing around Red saw a snaky gleam rising high close at hand. For an instant he couldn't place that ominous thing. Then he recognized a long, slim branch coated with an inch or more of clear rain-ice. As he looked he thought he saw it squirm, moving. Above it, he saw a gray mist—the faint splashing of water, nearly turned to balls of ice. And then, away yonder, he heard the gathering crash and rending of forest canopy branches ripping under the dead weight of clinging, convoluted enveloping icicles.

"A man wouldn't be safe theh in the brakes!" Red shook his head, and at that instant he felt a tiny jerk, a throb that ran the length of the hollow snag in which he had found his safe, dry refuge.

"That's the anchor-branch slippin' in the bottom!" Red identified the movement. "The riveh's fallin', now. Course, the freeze 'd shrink hit!"

He raised his head to look around, and gave a yelp of indignant and anguished astonishment. The river had fallen more than two feet since the snag came to anchor in the eddy. That had turned the log almost imperceptibly, more and more.

Red's squawk was when he saw faintly in the gloom a cascading little stream of water coming through a crack in the broken branch. What with the pry-weight of the ice-laden upstanding branches and the peavey-turn of the snag on the bottom, the snag trunk had been rolled over so far that now water was pouring slowly but irresistibly into that very hollow wherein the river-rat had made his nest for two days and nearly four nights.

"I'm being drowned out!" he wailed, and as he profanely wept, the tree-trunk heaved again so that a little flood came gushing into the warmed hollow, a wavelet swashing down the full length of the man who could only

squirm, grab the canvasback duck and go reaching out as the log rolled more than half over. No wet cat ever crawled scrambling forth in an inundation, more angrily surprised.

He grasped at branches, and slipped off bulbs of sleet. He kicked and scrabbled, and finally, thrown into the eddy, he took the duck by the neck in his teeth and swam to the sandbar. He crawled out on it, and found the icy sleet there above the water-line to be as slick as grease. He could stand up only with the utmost effort and heading over the dunes, as slick as icebergs, he partly walked, partly slid and generally crawled and squirmed, up and down.

As he came over one ridge he saw floating comfortably in a bay a shanty-boat with a bright light within. He heard through the clattering downpour the blows of hatchets and as he passed by around the bay's edge in the gloom he had the satisfaction of seeing two humans working on the cabin scaling away the thick heavy ice from roof and decks. But alongside the cabin-boat he saw that the canvas hood over a skiff needed no such breaking-away of the ice. He wondered at that for a moment, till underneath through a crack he saw the blue flames of a three-burner gasoline stove. The heat of that was melting the ice, or rather keeping the rain as rain till it ran over the side into the river.

"Yeh, I wisht they'd 'a' slept till they sunk!" the observer grumbled. "My lan'! I gotta go to Tiptonville! The las' place where I'd be stopping I've gotta go! Anyhow, theh's three cotton-gins. That's one satisfaction. A feller can most gen'ly git into a cotton-gin! Theh's worse places to sleep in 'n boll-cotton, too. Course, hit's linty an' the oil makes a feller smell like a picker. Same time, hit's better'n nothing to stand under but these cold, sleet-in' clouds! Lawse—lawse!"

Cold, chilling, disconsolate, slipping and sliding, pulling himself along on his hands and knees when he climbed the slope into the bottom level, Red Rufus dodged a willow-tree which came bending down toward him. He paused to watch while householders lit their lamps and ran frantically out when a woodshed crashed with a terrific rending of thin boards.

"Well, I'm lucky I aint got no house to cave in, anyhow!" Red mused. "I betteh be cyarful which gin I go into, lest it might crash in too! I expect a man cain't be too putickler, a night like this, where he lays up!"

The first gin he came to was a huge gloom against the gray night sky. He circled around, studied the little office-building with its light and the red glow of a fire kept by the night watchman.

"He's fixed theh to stay!" Red decided, and finding a loose window he crawled into the cotton house and burrowed deep into the heap of last-pick bolls. Surrounded by the fluff which drew away the wet while it enclosed his body warmth, Red sighed at last, no longer shivering, his head resting on the canvasback duck for a pillow, tired again and sleepy.

"My lan'!" he whispered, dreamily. "I'm sho' lucky!"

IN the morning he waited for sounds of starting up the day's work in the gin. Instead, every one in town seemed to be busy chopping ice from the roofs and even climbing out through windows in order to split the ice so that doors could be opened. Light-wires were down, telephone-wires were sagging, as though the metals were stretching much thinner. The dry rattle of falling rain congealing on the ice already located was broken at frequent intervals by the rasping, shuddering crash as tree-branches broke or overburdened framework was felled to the ground by the insensate clinging of freezing sleet.

Hunger of three days' duration would not be denied. Red Rufus surveyed Tiptonville uneasily. That town had no welcome for him. He was known there by sundry short-tempered people. He knew the night-lie of the town, and he recalled with warm emotions sundry hectic hours when the strong arm of the city marshal had nabbed him, not by his shuckable coat collar, but outrageously by his slim neck itself. Then handcuffs had been clamped on his wrists so tightly that they not only interfered somewhat with circulation and comfort, but were too close to be slipped—which was insulting. Then had followed some few procedures with which Red Rufus was tiresomely familiar—like being booked at headquarters, and locked up in the bird-cage within the wooden shack of the city jail, followed by mental discomfort before a grave city recorder who hesitated between a six months' sentence—at hard labor—and a grand jury commitment on charge of grand larcenies.

"I like to never got out of that fix!" Red Rufus grumbled to himself. "An' they've been waiting for me eveh sint! If I wasn't so hog-hongry I bet I wouldn't stay heah two minutes!"

HE circled around the outskirts, going clear around the town. People were too busy peeling ice to pay attention to the humped-up shoulders of the passer-by. He shoved his hands deep into his pockets—then he caught his breath.

"If I didn't forget I had money!" he gasped. "Theh I got all that I earned off'n that there hist'ries-writer! *Shu-u!*"

His recognition and flight out of New Madrid had just completely jarred the recollection of his little fortune from his mind. Disgusted with himself, he headed straight through to the shack "lunchery" in which he well knew he could eat amply, with no questions asked. In the farthest corner on a counter stool he ordered the whole works, from soup to pie. He ate seventy cents' worth and tipped the waitress a dime. She smiled good-humoredly on him.

Glancing up and down the crystallized street he could see no one, so he headed toward the river, for no other reason than the fact that the river-bank was always a safe bet. Coming up the sidewalk a moment later he saw some one. He thought he recognized the fellow—was sure of it when breasting into the northeast wind, the slipping walker proved to be Travers Wilicum. Red Rufus sidestepped into a corner of a second-story stairway. Wilicum went on by to the bank, and when Red Rufus watched through the window—casually—he saw a stack of fives handed through to the histories-writer, who looked surprised and immensely gratified.

"No wonder I didn't get so much!" Red Rufus grumbled. "He don't have his wad all to onct. Hit's sent to him. That piecemeal way aint no satisfaction to me—don't neveh get a big haul off that kind of tripper! Besides, if they don't get it by mail or off'n banks, they carry travelers' checks which aint no good to anybody on earth but the feller who has to sign 'em. 'Nough to make a man sick—huh!"

Wilicum paused in the bank entrance, looking up and down the vacant street. Then he started diagonally across to the combined grocery and meat-market.

"Acts like he 'lowed to load right up!" Wilicum grunted. "If I could get clost enough 'thout his seein' me I might finger that wad, too. Then I'd have a lots bigger stake. He had seventy-eighty dollars. I'll git back down by the gin. If I can land on his neck oveh the bank on the bar I bet I could get away."

Down at the gin he saw a darky coming from the cotton

house with a puzzled look on his face and a canvasback duck in his hand. The cotton factor's buyer met the darky.

"Boss, I found this duck theh in the cotton! How come?"

The buyer looked the duck over and some men came out of the scales office where they sat around the fire to keep warm. Red Rufus listened to the arguments from the edge of the group, whether the bird had come in a load of cotton—and how—or busted through a window? Incautiously Red drew nearer, deftly picking an obvious pocket or two.

Inadvertently, in his eagerness—he always grew a bit excited in a crowd—he found himself right square in the middle, looking into the eyes of the very dad-blasted City Marshal Palding who had caught him more than a year before, and from whom he had afterwards escaped by having the luck to find the handcuff-keys. Ever since the city marshal had been waiting hopefully for another whack—now most unexpectedly the whack was right there!

Red Rufus bounded away as City Marshal Jim Palding leaped, pulling his forty-five revolver. Palding slipped on the glare of ice which covered everything, and the river-rat scuttled.

"He can't shoot straight thataway!" Red chuckled, and rabbiting in a zigzag course, he darted behind an ice-coated dray, leaped a picket-fence, ran around a white house, put a big oak tree behind him, dodged through a mule-yard, and struck for the woods south of town, while behind him over rough cotton-ground were strung out a score of enthusiastic, gyrating pursuers, a number of them shooting energetically and without deliberation.

"They cain't shoot for a cent!" Red Rufus thought contemptuously as he heard the bullets chipping through the falling icy rain. "Hope I don't fall an' break a leg—dod-blasted 'lectric flashes! Them sparkles blind a feller—Ugh! Theh's one scoundrel what's shootin' clost!"

Accordingly, side-jumping irregularly, slipping forward as he ran, Red raced for cover.

CHAPTER XII

GLOWING warmly with satisfaction and genial dissimulation, Detective Judson Miles found it the simplest matter in the world to bandy persiflage with Edna Lee, the lonely lady in the brown cabin-boat at the upper Point Pleasant crossing eddy. Even though she had heard about his launch being stolen, knew that he was a detective, and at first regarded him with suspicion, she soon seemed sure that he had no designs on her. She talked about her long trip down the Ohio River, as though she expected him to believe that misleading line of patter. For the rest he basked cheerfully in her radiance of reckless entertainment.

"I just sickened of all work an' no play," she announced. "I'd worked since I was fourteen. I was saving, but every night I was tired. I lived to home too—no movies, no fellers, nothing but sit there an' read or just sit. It was so for ten years, never a break. I'd been promoted a-plenty. All the boys passed me up when I was in the basement, when I was on the linens, and after I went into the office. No class to me, I reckon. Then a fellow run me off my feet, married me in six weeks—and they caught him dead, with three bullets in him as he shot it out with a night-watch an' a coupla bulls. I'd never stopped working, not to be married or nothing. Then they had me in as Queen of the Yeggs—me, who'd never been handmaid to a bride. I didn't even know my man was a crook—

he treated me nice—till they had me up for examination. They let me go, but I was fired—canned out of my job. Funny 'bout that, though. I'd never spent no money, dressed plain, banked my wages, 'cepting what few clothes I had. And at the bank they told me I'd ought to invest, so they told me what. I kept buying, selling—an' you know, I was gettin' more income than I was wages! So I come off down the Ohio."

Judson Miles wondered if she expected him to believe that? He assumed his most congratulatory expression. As a good stall he told her how he had started in himself as a bus-boy in a swell restaurant, watching the cooks and studying the boss chef, not wanting to grow up and be just a waiter. He described his Eats Shoppe in Omaha, and how he always had worked, being himself mighty saving, studying detective work, and taking the famous "Find Your Man" course. The course had assured him that it was always best to tell the truth, since facts were easier to remember, unless the truth was a give-away.

"I'm tripping downriver right now, on a case," he explained.

"I heard you was looking for a lady."

"Oh, yes!" he assured her, blandly, with his air of utmost innocence. "I'm combing old Mississipp'—drapping down."

"I might's well be dropping down, too," she suggested, and he beamed with unassumed delight. If he could only get her down to Mendova!

Gallantly he hauled up the anchor of the brown cabin-boat. The two boats, scow and cruiser, were lashed together, side by side, with tire-case fenders. The eddy swung them into the crossing and they floated swiftly past the new towheads and bars at Tiptonville, and on beyond.

She had a talking-machine and plenty of well-assorted records, playing these when her stock of ideas needed replenishing. Her trustfulness and her friendliness troubled the conscience of Judson Miles. He had not foreseen a lady so lonely and so much in need of a champion. It required considerable effort to analyze her talk with keen perspicuity.

He went to his launch to study the reward-notice. Putting her story with the two-hundred-fifty-dollar reward, he pieced matters up to his own satisfaction and embarrassment. Unquestionably she was wanted in regard to her yegg husband's past—or perhaps to get a line on her husband's pals. When he cautiously and casually suggested that it must have been a hard deal of Fate's which married a nice reputable working-girl to a thoroughly bad criminal, she admitted it was.

"They had my picture in the papers," she said. "People recognized me round my folks' place. They pointed at me—I couldn't go anywhere and not have it thrown in my face. That's how-come I chanced down the Ohio and ran through the pool dams."

She wouldn't admit she knew anything about the Missouri River, nor that she had ever eaten in an Omaha lunchroom. Otherwise she kept nothing back. Miles wondered what she had been up against in Omaha or down the Missouri that she so steadfastly refused to check herself anywhere above Cairo on the Mississippi River.

Studying the matter as coldly as feasi-

ble, the detective came to the probability that the attorneys seeking to connect with Adeline Laura Bonney really needed her as a witness for the defense of some crook or other, to prove an alibi or add to the infamy of her deceased criminal husband. In either case Miles felt sorry for her. She had come down the river to escape just those things. He reflected that in pursuing her he was completing the "Find Your Man" course—performing an actual detective operation. He wasn't doing it just for the two hundred and fifty dollars, for he had spent five hundred dollars on the case already, not counting the cost of his glass-cabin cruiser.

More and more his memory reminded him of the page in his course which warned him that he must not under any circumstances permit sympathy or regard for a fugitive or a suspect or an object of surveillance to interfere with his task in hand. His sole and only concern must be Justice, those who had employed him, or the Honor of the Profession. He must take for an example the steel trap.

He sat on the bow of the little brown shanty-boat across the deck from Edna Lee, so-called. The river current carried them gently into crossing, bend and reach. The young woman conversed for a time rather breathlessly, entertaining him. He in turn handed out a good line of give-and-take gossip, interlarded now and again with leading questions and patter which would draw her into significant admissions and self-betraying remarks. She talked more and more freely about her slain husband. He had been so friendly, so considerate, so interesting! Never had he hinted that he was a desperado, blower of safes and gunman of the alleys. True, she had seen his automatic pistol, but he had explained that he had to pack it because of dogs and his occupation. He pretended to be a debt-collector, which accounted for his frequently carrying large sums of money, postage-stamps in thick packages, and other valuables.

"I lived at home," she said; "he had to travel lots, he told me, and he give me the time of my life when he was around. Nobody ever tried to please me before. I don't



"Please, Mr. Miles—you wouldn't mind staying near by?"
"Edna Lee," he said gruffly, "you can depend on me!"

care if he was a thief—he treated me like a lady and like he loved his wife!”

Obviously, she liked being treated like a lady. Miles considered the matter from all viewpoints. She was loosening up on a good many details, the value of which he couldn't estimate, but of which he made careful notes so if he had to be a witness he would have the details in hand.

The day waned. They were carried over into an eddy on the east side of the river where sandbars were numerous, long and interspersed by little chute channels. Uneasily, Miles reflected that here was an embarrassing situation. He was reluctant to stay, but if he took his departure he might lose his quarry. He didn't know whether to mention the matter or wait for her to broach the subject.

Suddenly she gave the anchor a kick and it fell overboard with a splash. Headway and a reverse current brought the cable taut. They were hung up for the night, apparently. He started to go on board his boat, but she checked him.

“Please, Mr. Miles!” She rested a restraining hand on his elbow. “I'm afraid to stay here alone! I've been growing so nervous! You're a detective. I'm so far from everybody—with your launch alongside I'd feel safe. I didn't mind it so much on the Ohio—it wasn't so wide nor so big. It wasn't so wild and terrible. You wouldn't mind staying near by?”

“Why, of course not!” he declared heartily. “You can bet on me!”

“I knew it!” Her eyes filled. “I know it's dreadful—but if you left me here I b'lieve I'd scream! I just couldn't stand it!”

“Don't you worry a bit!” He patted her on the shoulder. “You can depend on me!”

“I knew it—the minute I saw you!” she exclaimed. “I thought at first I just wouldn't care—not for anything. Then you came along and I tried—I was going to— But the way you looked at me—and I knew you were a detective and reliable— Oh, I'm so glad you weren't different! In the store we had house-detectives, watching for shoplifters and looking out generally. Some of them were perfectly grand! You made me think of their chief, the first thing when I knew you were a detective.”

“Edna Lee,” Judson Miles said gruffly, “you can depend on me!”

“I knew it!” She nodded. “Oh, I was sure of it! An' now we can get supper. I don't know what possessed me, getting so much. And I haven't hardly had any appetite. I bought enough to feed a horse, so we'll have plenty—”

“I've quite a lot too,” he told her, “and when I was in my lunchroom, I could cook. Mighty few could flap a jack with me, stack the toast or broil a steak like I could do! You watch me, now!”

SHE spread the table and he picked and chose from his own box of supplies, ransacking her cupboard for a line on her appetite-preferences. Her gasoline stove was a wonder, and had a full length aluminum-copper plate, which she had never used. He set the plate and presently had it smoking. Swiftly he laid out his menu and before the girl could have believed it possible, he was serving them both in the easiest, most graceful manner imaginable.

“I aint lost my hand at it yet!” he said, smiling at her protestations of astonishment and admiration.

“And this coffee!” she exclaimed.

“It's in the buying, in the making, in putting the cream into the cup first, an' pouring the coffee into it. You

can't mix coffee right if you pour the cream into the black. I don't know why it is, but that's a fact for a good taster.”

Representing the law, at least in their estimation, Miles must needs maintain the dignity and honor of his new profession. He did the best he could. He dined with the young woman, and treated her right, the very best he knew how. She was afraid—Old Mississipp' had wrought on her nerves till she could no longer stand the deadly, menacing strain. The arrival of the detective had made her jubilant, and now his respect and gallantry entirely soothed the terror which lurked beneath the surface of her gay mood.

The two were companions a long time that night, and when finally he bade her good-by they found rain falling from clouds which had stolen softly across the sky. That rain was still a downpour when late in the morning they breakfasted. No use trying to trip in the storm, so they made the most of the music and of their confidences, and that night they were surprised to find the deck of the cabin-boat covered with thin, slick ice. The ropes mooring the boats together were ice-cased, and when Miles essayed to go aboard his cabin launch he slipped and fell sprawling on his own craft's splash-deck.

IN the morning all the doors of the boats were sealed by stalactites of ice which had run down the cabins. Miles found a loose window out of which he climbed, at first with a caseknife with which he tried to whittle away the coating. Later he went at the thick mass in alarm, using a real hatchet, splitting off the scale as he had learned years ago to block out ice for his lunchroom refrigerator.

The cabin-boat had sunk under the weight of the ice till there was an open seam under water. The hull of the brown cabin-boat had water on one end of the sitting-room floor when Miles went to work. Edna Lee toiled swiftly as well, pumping the hold. The loggy craft must be well cared for to save them from careening and becoming wholly waterlogged. Having chipped away several hundred pounds of the ice, freeing the hull of the weight, the shanty-boat grew much lighter and Miles went to work on his own cruiser, which was down by the stern. As he worked more sleet fell, but he was faster than the storm.

Building a hot fire in the sitting-room stove of the cabin-boat, the roof was presently warmed through and Miles shunted off into the river blocks of ice inches thick and covering six or eight square feet.

With both bow and stern cabin-doors open, and the cabin-boat hull riding light again Edna Lee's gratitude was not withheld.

“I'd 'a' been sealed in and sunk, but for you!” she told Miles, who tried to deny what really would have been true.

“Pshaw!” he said. “It wasn't anything!”

“It was everything!” she assured him, and proceeded to feed him after such hours of chopping and prying as he had never before undertaken. His arms were almost too tired to cut meat or spread butter on hot bread. He had seldom been so weary. . . .

Detective Judson Miles had never been looked after by anyone. He had fed thousands, and now urgently he was desired to tell what he liked and how he liked it. In a flutter Edna Lee watched him with the most obvious of interest and evident effort to show her feeling of thankfulness.

“You're so good!” she assured him, which made him feel happy and foolish. Presently he was speechless under the realization that he was just stalling along, inveigling this



Red Rufus bounded away as City Marshal Jim Palding leaped, pulling his revolver. Palding slipped on the glare of ice, and the river-rat scuttled.

young woman down the river so that he could close the case of Adeline Laura Bonney, receiving the two-hundred-fifty-dollar reward as proof of his astute handling of the first genuine detective-work he had begun, carried on and must in honor bring to a successful conclusion.

With his sense of duty conflicted another feeling, that of pity and regret. A thousand times he had evaded in his own mind an issue which had not infrequently embarrassed him when he was just the proprietor, cook and usually the waiter in his lunchroom. Police, plainclothes men and sheriff-office deputies, as well as railroad, express-company, and agency detectives had crowded him to obtain information about his customers, or at least some of them.

But Miles had evaded their importunities, even though he envied the operators. How often had he curled his lips at the thought of squealing on some poor devil, some ignorant boy who had gone wrong. He knew a lot of those fellows. Many a girl and woman had come his counter's way, slinking by. Judson Miles had held his peace, knowing far more than any of his questioners suspected. He had even had a clientele of newspaper men, pressmen, reporters, office-boys; not infrequently an editor. He had persuaded them to talk but left them with the impression that he didn't know what it was all about. All the while he had nourished his secret ambition to be a detective. Now he was one. He began to wish he wasn't.

This girl trusted him; she confided in him; she looked at him with a shine in her eyes that no other woman's eyes had had for sight of him. She told him intimate details about the mob to which her husband had belonged. She

told him names—Red Larry, Hot-car Pinblow, Wide-brim Bettor. There had been a woman too—a cold, wedge-faced woman, Low-heel Alice, and the girl who had always made an honest living didn't like her—hated her without knowing who she was or what she was.

"She planned the raids," the widow of the dead yeggman said. "Oh, I know she did, now—the boys went raiding, and she lurked in the background, and I don't know what she was—"

"Find the woman!" Miles suggested.

"They found *me*—they didn't find her!" the river-tripping young widow choked. "They blamed me for it—they tried to show I was in it—but all of a sudden I could go. Now there's nothing left of me but a rotten reputation!"

Judson Miles listened to the strangling sobs of the young woman. She was just broken, hurt, despairing—worn by months alone on the river. At last she had a sympathetic listener, a big strong man of whom she was not in the least afraid. He patted her on the shoulder, saying, "There! There!" and deep in his throat he was cursing himself for a soft-hearted boob, feeling anything but exultation to find the rewarded girl coming his way, all to the good! But his pride was dashed. He had to fight his own heart to keep steadfast, and not let a pretty jane play on his sympathies—when his stern sense of duty demanded that he run this job through right, bringing her to the lawyers who just had to have her—with two hundred and fifty dollars public reward, and five hundred dollars special reward for Judson Miles if he closed the case satisfactorily!

He was glad to fight some more ice to relieve his feelings.

This unique story of a phase of our American life that is seldom depicted in fiction comes to a climax in the next, the January, issue.

The Flight of the Doomed

Risking one life may not mean much, to save an Army Division—but when it happens to be your own life, it does!

By LAURENCE LA TOURETTE DRIGGS

Illustrated by Charles Durant

THE General eyed me intently. I stood rigidly before his desk, holding my oil-stained flying helmet and goggles in my hand. Unblinking, concentrated scrutiny lay behind those blue eyes. Without shifting his gaze an instant he waved his hand, dismissing the two attendants who had brought me in.

"Tell Colonel Ripley I want him!"

"Yes sir."

The two guards saluted and left the room.

"Do you know why I sent for you, Captain Steele?" barked the General. He had a suspicious tone in his voice.

"No sir. My orders were to fly over in a captured German machine and report to you at nine A. M. The Hanover is on your supply field under a guard, sir."

"Did you tell anybody you were coming here?" From the tail of an eye I saw another officer enter the room and close the door behind me.

"No sir."

"That is well. Sit down."

The tall Colonel approaching behind me, dressed in slacks, gave me a sharp inspection as I took my seat. He caught a look from his chief and stepped by me with a long stride. The two of them went to the high window overlooking the north where the big guns were booming. They turned their backs to me and conversed in low tones.

Devilish secretive, these American secret-service officers! I kept my mind a blank to avoid reviewing my latest misdeeds. At last the conference ended. The tall Colonel walked around the desk and with a friendly grin on his face took a chair beside me.

"Ah—I am Colonel Ripley," he said, holding out his cigarette-case. "You went over the enemy lines on a special mission—last June, wasn't it?"

"Yes sir," I replied. I took a cigarette, enormously relieved in mind.

"If I recall correctly—you dropped our operative, Number Thirty-four, up near Metz that night."

"Yes sir. I took a man over and landed him in a field this side of Metz. It was the night of June fourth."

"Quite so." The Colonel turned his cigarette-case over and examined it closely on both sides.

"You were given command of your squadron, just following that dangerous and very successful adventure, I believe."

"Yes sir."

He threw a sudden quick glance into my eyes.

"You speak German like a native, I'm told. Did you attend the university in Germany?"

"No sir. I went to school in Munich. My father was American consul there for several years."

"Ah, yes. I remember." Colonel Ripley shot a look across to General Wade, who was watching me sharply. Then he spoke in German.

"We want our agent Number Sixteen in Montfauçon before dark tonight," he said. "It is a risky mission. Who is the best pilot in your outfit for this job?"

Montfauçon! It was the headquarters of the German Crown Prince—this I knew. Perched atop the highest point of Montfauçon hill, this eldest son of the Kaiser for several weeks had lain dormant in his concrete stronghold, watching with his field-glasses the movements of our doughboys in their positions south of the Argonne Forest. The sector along the Meuse from Verdun to Sedan was held by the Crown Prince with the Fifth Army.

There were no landing-fields for airplanes near Montfauçon. We had photographed this area time and again. Swiftly my mind coursed over the vicinity, to select the most appropriate spot for a landing. A special mission, to be made in the daylight!

Ten miles north of Montfauçon lay Dun. Seven miles east lay Sivry. In either place, airplanes could come safely down, and quickly could get away again. But both these towns were across the Meuse from Montfauçon. How could Number Sixteen get to Montfauçon in plain daylight, through this region which swarmed with German troops?

However, that was the spy's lookout, not mine.

"I will go, sir," I replied in German. "There is no field



Already the bandit overhead had begun to shoot from three hundred yards.

at Montfauçon. On the river flats, near Sivry, I think is the best place for landing him."

"He is to be landed on the German airdrome at Montmedy," said Colonel Ripley softly. "Both the pilot and our operative will wear German uniforms. The mission will be made in a German two-seater plane."

The sudden start of surprise I made was entirely involuntary. I saw the General's blue eyes harden. But he was dead wrong in suspecting I was going to back out. The Colonel's remark about a German two-seater plane had rung a bell in my brain—that was all.

Yesterday morning one of my pilots had shot down a two-seater Hanover. It had landed inside our lines without injury. The enemy pilot, one Captain Buchalter, was found to have a bullet through his lungs. His observer, a Corporal Schneider, had received a less serious wound. Both were removed to a hospital where our Intelligence officials had questioned them. Before the captured Hanover had reached our airdrome, I received strict orders over the telephone to maintain absolute silence on this victory. I was directed to fly the Hanover next morning, over to our secret-service headquarters and report personally to General Wade at nine o'clock, without mentioning to anyone these instructions.

And now—here I was, and the explanation for all this secrecy was being revealed.

"You don't want to undertake this mission!" the General said challengingly. He stared at me with open contempt. "There's no compulsion about it, remember! This is purely a voluntary mission."

There was a shrewd look in his eyes.

"I'll go, sir," I said, keeping my anger out with an effort.

"It's a risky job. You understand we can do nothing for you if you are caught over the lines dressed in an enemy uniform. On the other hand, if you succeed in your mission, I promise you now a promotion in rank. Furthermore, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your courage, has perhaps, saved the lives of many of our American soldiers."

"I have no German uniform," I said.

"That will be given you."

"What do I say when I land at Montmedy?"

"You will have proper credentials—don't worry about that. Your name is Captain Johan Buchalter. You belong to the Sixth Observation Squadron of the Second German Army, stationed at Cambrai. Your passenger is Corporal Benjamin Schneider, your observer, attached to the same squadron. Both these men, you recall, are in our hospital. The German fighting pilots at Montmedy will not know these fellows."

"I will go, sir."

"When you land, you will sign your name and your passenger's name in their visitors' book. Number Sixteen will take care of himself after that. You fly back here—and report. We shall notify all of our air units between here and Verdun to leave your Hanover unmolested—both coming and going. You yourself immediately will order two of your squadron planes to escort you this afternoon to the lines, at Rheims. They will meet you at the same place to escort you back home to your field.

The only question is, have you audacity enough—nerve enough—to take care of yourself? Can you land Number Sixteen there without giving yourself away?"

I smiled, but made no reply.

"If you have," said the General harshly, "take that pencil, and write down your name, ten times. Your name is Captain Johan Buchalter. And remember, while you are writing, that only God in heaven can come to your aid if you are caught."

Ten times I wrote down on the pad: "*Johan Buchalter, Captain—6th Obs. Sq.—2nd Army.*"

I wondered what Johan Buchalter looked like. The icy contempt of the General had put my dander up. I wrote with a firm hand.

"Get me that map," directed General Wade. The Colonel spread a large map of the sector on the desk. The three of us bent over it.

Stripped to the skin, several hours later, I put on the garments handed me by Fitzgerald, the General's secretary. Every article had been made in Germany. In the pocket of the flying tunic I found a handkerchief of yellow silk, a large letter B embroidered on one corner. In the inside pocket were several letters addressed in a small feminine hand to Herr Johan Buchalter, Captain-pilot, Jagstaffel No. 6. They were signed "Athore," and postmarked from Cologne. Evidently "Athore" was the sweetheart of the poor devil in the hospital with a bullet through his lungs. I looked at myself in the small mirror, my nerves quivering a bit as I discovered a round hole, neatly darned, just to the left of my right armpit. Probably these were the prisoner's garments, down to the last sock.

My German pocketbook containing German money, my German log-book, German map, German credentials—yesterday all this was the property of Johan Buchalter. The General must have planned this Montmedy mission on the spur of the moment—after our capture of the Hanover.

I did not have a chance to talk with my passenger until at three o'clock that afternoon I stepped into the General's big car which stood at the door. There on the back seat sat a diminutive little chap with a scrawny red mustache, dressed like myself in a German uniform, but wearing a yellow tab at each side of his collar instead of pilot's wings. None of the chauffeurs or orderlies standing about the entrance seemed to take any unusual interest in this exhibition of enemy uniforms. They were used to strange sights around secret-service headquarters.

"My name's Lenmann," said the little man, holding a leather dispatch-case on his lap with one hand while he offered me the other.

"I thought it was Schultz," I remarked.

He grinned. He was a cool one, this Number Sixteen. He started off to hobnob with the enemy as though it was a gay matinee he was headed for. Even at that I didn't give him full credit, as I came to discover later.

Two mechanics from the supply hangar helped me make a last hasty inspection of the ship. Already they had been over her carefully. They had dumped the American gas I had put in the tank this morning, and had substituted a poorer grade of fuel which the Mercedes motor was more accustomed to. Extraordinary precautions these birds took—they even knew how a Mercedes motor should sound!



Number Sixteen looked at me reprovingly as I leaned over him in the rear cockpit and tested his safety-belt. I fastened the machine-gun on its tourelle so that it wouldn't swing, and removed the control-stick from its socket between his small feet.

He had fastened his bag of papers securely to the iron rod beneath his seat. Evidently it contained "information" for the enemy.

"I don't know how much flying you've done," I said, "but I'm going to tell you a few things anyway. You're not to touch this gun, unless I tell you to. We won't be shot at in German territory, because they can tell from our markings that this is a German plane. If we're waylaid on this side the lines, that'll be just too bad, for we can't shoot back at our own planes anyway."

Lenmann nodded his head impatiently as he buckled on his helmet.

"We're supposed to be flying from Cambrai to Montmedy," I went on. "We'll cross the lines west of Fismes, so as to come into Montmedy from the right direction. When we land, I'll taxi up to their operations office and sign your name and mine in the visitors' book. You will have to show your own credentials, if they ask for 'em."

"I've been through all this before," he exclaimed in a peevish tone. "I know exactly what to do."

"You listen to me, just the same," I said. "When you get out of this bus you can do as you please, but while we are in the air, I am in command."

"You better do the talking to those flyers, Captain. I'll keep my mouth shut until you give me the word."

"Gut!" I said. I didn't care to inquire into his plans or intentions. The less I knew about them the better.

Two of my pilots had been summoned to act as my escort as far as the lines. Mastick and Pomeroy, both of them my classmates at Harvard, were sitting in their Spads on the line, their props slowly ticking over. Their eyes were popping, as they recognized me in my new uniform. I walked over and had a word with each of them while the mechanics were warming up the Hanover's motor.

It was three-fifteen when our little flotilla left the ground. The wind-cone hung flabbily down from the hangar roof. The air was absolutely still this sultry September afternoon. I had sixty miles to go through hostile country to reach the lines. Then ahead another sixty miles lay Montmedy, inside friendly territory—friendly to a Hanover marked with glaring black Maltese crosses, the emblem of the German airmen. Not a soul knew of our destination, save General Wade and Colonel Ripley.

For twenty minutes I climbed in wide spirals over the supply sheds. At five thousand feet it began to get cool. At ten thousand feet it was freezing. At fifteen thousand feet it was frigid. Here we clung, for my clumsy Hanover with its extra passenger could climb no higher. My two Spads were nearly a mile above us, pushing out on either side like feelers, as we headed north and made for Fismes.

Our American doughboys now lay entrenched along the

Vesle River. The furious fighting around Chateau Thierry had eased a bit, and they lay licking their wounds, figuratively speaking, and contemplating fresh advances toward Berlin. Rumor had it that our next push was to be launched against the almost impenetrable Argonne Forest, against the Crown Prince and his army at Montfaucon. For the past twenty-four hours our airmen had observed a movement of German troops toward this threatened point which indicated that the enemy too had heard this rumor. I wondered what Number Sixteen was going to do about it. At the present moment he was crouched forlornly down in his cockpit, hugging himself to keep warm. Only the top of his helmet could be seen through the slip of a windshield.

I kept an eye on the horizon to pick up the first distant speck which might develop into a hostile plane. All airplanes were hostile, so far as we were concerned. All had to be avoided. Orders had been sent out to all American and French airdromes to leave a certain Hanover unmolested—but had every pilot on the Front properly digested that order?

The forest of Rheims lay spread out across our right. Rheims lay somewhere ahead, hidden beneath the ground haze. The two Spads, a mile above us and a mile ahead, were drawing together and turning toward the west. I strained my eyes in that direction and at length picked up a group of five tiny dots against the blue. Those were fighting planes, flying at that height. American, French or British—it didn't matter which—they had to be evaded. They were



The Colonel spread a large map of the sector on the desk. The three of us bent over it.

coming east in a direct line with us.

For five minutes I watched them, estimating their course and speed. Pomeroy and Mastick would join them, but would they be able to divert them from me? Certainly the formation would intercept me before I could reach the trenches north of Fismes. Already forty minutes had passed. We had another hundred miles to go.

I decided to abandon my escort and push for the lines east of Rheims. Better to risk meeting another formation than to retreat and waste thirty more minutes.

Sheering over to the right across the woodland hills, I dropped down several thousand feet, the better to blend with the landscape. After a few minutes at a stiff pace I had the satisfaction of seeing that all was turning out as I wished. My Spads met the others, and soon the whole flock turned north toward the lines, gradually fading from view.

Humming the chorus of "Mademoiselle from Armentieres" in time with the throb of the sturdy Mercedes, I looked about the skies with considerable elation of mind. The motor was functioning perfectly. There was not another speck in the heavens. As I coasted swiftly along, my thoughts suddenly fastened upon a letter which last night I had left unfinished.

We skirted the American Archy batteries west of Epernay, not anxious to tempt the gunners there to plaster the sky in our vicinity with bursts of smoke which could

be seen afar, and translated by American airmen would read, "*Enemy airplane overhead.*" Spreading globes of white smoke far in the east even now pointed out some German photographer who was taking his afternoon pictures of our trenches. Another ten minutes and we would be in friendly territory, where Maltese crosses on a Hanover would invoke cheers instead of shrapnel.

A MOMENT later the Hanover rocked violently. I heard a dull *crum-pp!* behind her tail. We were eleven thousand feet up, and even as I cursed the eagle-eyed artillerymen below, I had to admire their good marksmanship. Two more "*crumps*" went off at the same elevation on either side of us. They were laying a bracket to get our altitude.

I looked back at Number Sixteen. He stared at me with unconcealed terror in his face. His skin was pinched with the cold and his countenance was distorted with an agony of fear. Evidently he never before had been introduced to Archy. I grinned at him reassuringly, and cutting the motor we fell off to the right in a deep side-slip which presented the thin edges of our wings to the spotters below who were sighting on us from the north rim of the forest. A galaxy of bursts far overhead assured me that we had shaken them off. Rheims was plainly in sight to the left. The coast was clear.

But was it? As I looked back along the flooring of green trees beneath us, a glint of sunlight sparkled against some object between me and the forest. I glued my eyes to the spot. Half a minute passed before I could focus my gaze upon the tiny speck which had mirrored this flash. Then I saw a climbing plane more than a mile beneath us, its nose elevated in our direction. It was climbing toward us, moving along a parallel path.

There was no question about it—we were being pursued by a fast single-seater which lately had risen from the ground.

Where had he come from, anyway? I had avoided every flying-field on the map. Perhaps he had been joy-riding about the country and hadn't found time to read the General's orders about molesting Hanover ships. He certainly would reach our level before I could make the lines. I looked ahead and estimated distances.

Somme-Py lay in front of us, seven or eight miles behind the German trenches. If this ass in the climbing Nieuport persevered in following me across the lines, I might have to land there at Somme-Py through his bullets. His light ship could fly circles around my slow bus. He must be an American, for the French long ago had abandoned their Nieuports for Spads. The idiot was clinging tenaciously; he would reach us in another five minutes.

Cutting off the motor so that Lenmann could hear my voice, I leaned back to him and shouted:

"Swing that Parabellum gun over the side, so that bird down there can see we are armed! Shoot a few tracers at him, if necessary, but be damned sure you don't hit him. Keep him away while I make a landing."

Number Sixteen rose to his feet with a bewildered air and looked down over the side where I had pointed. He had been entirely unconscious of our predicament. He was not slow in following my instructions, however. As soon as he spotted the Nieuport he unfastened the catch, swung up the tourelle and pointed the gun down at our pursuer. As I buzzed up my motor I heard him goose the gun with a short burst. Then suddenly I heard him pour out a long burst. I looked down and saw his tracer bullets speeding straight at our little friend, who was below us now, less than a thousand feet. My inexperienced passenger was slightly overdoing his rôle.

The lad in the Nieuport veered widely away and began

to climb for altitude. At the same instant we received a furious bombardment from our Archy batteries near the Front. For a few minutes I had my hands full, dodging the exploding shells and keeping a constant eye upon this little pest of a Nieuport. He was getting into a favorable position to dive upon us from the rear. He had all the luck with him, for we couldn't shoot to kill.

We were immediately above the trenches when the Nieuport began his attack. Somme-Py was within gliding distance ahead. But there was no escaping this pilot's onrush, unless Lenmann could scare him away with another display of armed defense. This I decided was too risky. Number Sixteen might accidentally hit him.

Again stilling the motor's roar for a moment, I yelled to Lenmann to make fast his gun and look out for himself. Already the bandit overhead had begun to shoot from three hundred yards. I shoved the throttle full on, kicked my rudder over and threw the Hanover into a fast spin. Tracer bullets from the Nieuport snapped past my eyes. Looking back I found that Number Sixteen had been too scared to get my orders. He was still standing up in his cockpit, his safety-belt at the long leash, and my maneuver had caught him unprepared. With every revolution of the tail about its pivot, Lenmann's small figure was being thrown forcibly from side to side, accompanied by the lashing gun which swung freely on its mount. I had time for only one glance.

More smoke-bullets passed my head. Then at length I caught a glimpse of our disagreeable little antagonist diving away from us to get out of range. As I leveled off he turned south and began streaking it for home and mother. Evidently he was satisfied with his one brave effort. I took a full breath and looked about. Then I discovered the reason for the Nieuport's change of heart.

Descending upon us from far overhead came a flight of three enemy Fokkers. Our enemies had arrived just in time to save us from a friend!

Pursuers and pursued disappeared across the lines toward Chalons. I dusted out my office, glanced across the instrument-board and looked down at Somme-Py. Just as well we didn't have to land there after all. I turned around to bawl out my passenger and give him a piece of my mind about obeying orders. Probably he was scared to death with all this yammering.

He certainly looked it. He was clinging to the floor of his cockpit with both hands, trying to make himself smaller. I grinned to myself and felt better. I'd let him cringe for awhile; next time he'd listen to what I was telling him. Lucky those Fokkers had come to the rescue. Damn these daylight missions, anyway! Night missions are simple compared to this, for at night one is not hounded by these bloodthirsty Yankee pilots. Lenmann was cocky enough on the ground, but he'd certainly got his wind up, in the air.

FLYING midway between Vouziers and Montfauçon from here would bring us along the north rim of the Argonne Forest, near Grand Pré. In another half hour I would be rid of my passenger. I suddenly awoke to the fact that I'd better put a little thought on those first few minutes after landing on the enemy airdrome. This was delicate ground. I would have to watch my step.

Here and there German machines were moving to and from the lines. The landscape unrolled peacefully beneath our wings. Soon I caught the windings of the Meuse River. Grand Pré appeared at the left, and across to the right I picked up Montfauçon, easily identified from ten miles away by the conspicuous castle in concrete which marked the residence of the Kaiser's heir-apparent.

Looking back to point out to Number Sixteen his des-

mination, I discovered that his seat was vacant. My resentment boiled up again. In an instant I cut down the throttle and getting out of my belt I reached back and caught his arm, shouting at him in disgust to sit up—the danger was over. The moment I let go his arm it fell limply back to the floor.

Here was a mess! What was the matter with the fellow—had he fainted from fright, or had the machine-gun knocked him out while it was threshing about during that short spin? No bullets had come within ten yards of us. I looked back several times, but no reassuring glimpse of his head appeared through his windshield. I throttled down to slow speed while I turned this knotty problem over in my mind.

One thing was sure—I'd not go home to confront General Wade with this uncompleted mission, until I knew what the trouble was. I couldn't get back into Lenmann's seat until we reached the ground. I debated landing in some vacant field this side of Montmedy—but we might crack up, or get into some other jam. I dismissed the idea. I had a letter in my pocket to the C. O. of the Montmedy field, and the General had assured me that I could bank on that letter. I hadn't read it. I had no responsibility for Lenmann anyway, other than landing him at Montmedy. Everything considered, it was better to come down there.

As we slid down to the Montmedy air-drome, Number Sixteen still lay crouching on the floor, taking no interest in the imminent landing. On my last circle of the field, I felt a sudden "hunch." Without trying to analyze it, I instantly side-slipped away to the center of the field and stopped the motor, without taxiing up to the hangars where groups of German mechanics and pilots were watching our approach. Snapping off my belt, I slid back into Lenmann's cockpit before the Hanover had come to a stop. Putting my arms under him, I fetched him up and planted him on his seat. The glove of my right hand came away from his chest, soaked with his blood!

Already the attendants were running across the sod to meet us. Frozen stiff with shock and dismay, it took me a moment or two to get back my wits. I bent over the poor fellow, noting as I did so that two bullets had gone through his flying-coat where the leather stretched tight across his chest. Number Sixteen was still conscious, but he was a badly wounded man. He opened his eyes and spoke—fortunately in German.

"Take—my bag—to Number Twenty-seven—at Mont-faucon—" he gasped into my ear. "Twenty-seven—is Major Stellings—Staff Officer."

The panting faces of Captain Loerser's mechanics were peering over the sides of the cockpit, staring at us sympathetically with grease-blackened countenances.

"Roll the machine up gently, boys," I ordered. "There's

a wounded man here. One of you run ahead and get the doctor."

I sat with my arms about poor Lenmann, steadying his drooping body as best I could, while my brain raced ahead and pictured the inquisition which now was inevitable.

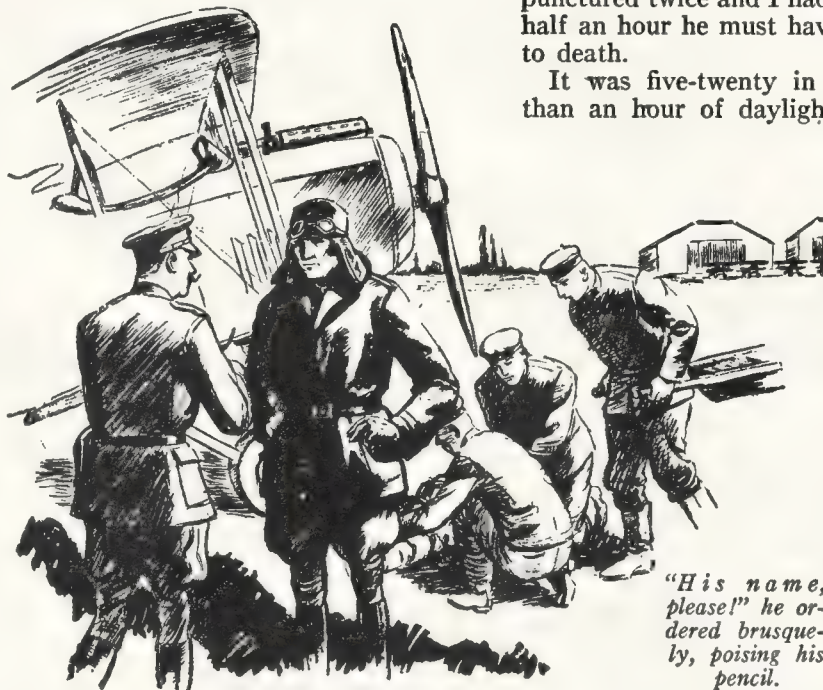
"Never mind—me," the spy whispered as we were being trundled on across the field. "I'm—done for. Get my papers—to Major Stellings—tonight—promise!"

I didn't know anything about these tortuous channels in our spy system, and I didn't care to be initiated. Number Sixteen's anxiety about getting his papers to Number Twenty-seven didn't interest me at all. My job was flying, not spying. I'd made a poor enough job of flying this afternoon. Lenmann evidently had been hit after I had thrown the ship into a spin. There's Fate for you! My own body had been stationary in my seat, while his had been threshing from side to side in his cockpit like a drunken pendulum. Yet his small chest had been punctured twice and I had not been touched. For half an hour he must have been bleeding slowly to death.

It was five-twenty in the afternoon. More than an hour of daylight remained. I took a

long look at it—and trundled on!

A large group of officers and men gathered about us as we lifted Lenmann's body up and eased him onto the ambulance stretcher. His pulse was beating feebly, but this last exertion had turned his face a ghastly blue. It needed no verdict of the doctor's to tell us that his minutes were numbered. I was rehearsing my opening lines while the doctor was giving



"His name, please!" he ordered brusquely, poising his pencil.

him a shot of something with a needle. He followed this by tilting a flask of brandy to his lips. The crack pilots of Herr Loerser's squadron sauntered jauntily about the Hanover, putting their fingers curiously into the bullet-holes around the back cockpit. Flying home with a dead man was no very exciting experience with them.

Thanks to this tragedy, my visit escaped the formalities usually attending the visit of a stranger. It was seen that we had been attacked by an enemy airplane, and this fortunate introduction gained me a very sympathetic welcome. But the situation was fraught with danger. Before this investigation ended I would be forced to make many explanations as to our identity—and our mission.

Lenmann breathed his last while we were watching him. The doctor shrugged his shoulders and immediately turned to me with a notebook in his hands.

"His name, please!" he ordered brusquely, poising his pencil.

"Corporal Benjamin Schneider, 6th Squadron, 2nd Army, Cambrai—" I began, when I was interrupted. An officer of forty or thereabouts elbowed his way through from the rear of the crowd and pushed toward me. He wore a major's insignia and on his collar were the purple tabs of the German Intelligence Staff. My heart sank into my boots.

As the doctor was writing down the name I had given him, this Intelligence officer walked up to the stretcher, took Number Sixteen's head in his hands and turned his face up. With his fingers still outstretched he wheeled sharply upon the doctor.

"That will do, Doctor," he ordered briefly. "Remove the corpse. Lock it up until I have his clothing searched. I know all about this." He turned to the group of loiterers and waved them away. I watched him with my heart beating in my throat.

"I received the radio message," he said looking at me fixedly. "I thought he was coming in an American airplane. Where do you come from?"

"Second Army Observation Corps, Number Six Squadron, sir."

"Do you know anything about his maps and papers?" he asked fiercely. "Were they lost in the fight?"

I looked at him coldly, controlling my voice with an effort.

"Who are you, sir?"

He threw me a withering look and stiffened his pose.

"Come with me," he ordered, and turned on his heel.

BEFORE obeying him I slipped my arm into Number Sixteen's cockpit and released the leather portfolio he had fastened there. My mind was giddy with impending disaster. All rehearsals had gone by the board. What did he mean about a radio message? How could Lenmann have sent such a message? Why hadn't they told me? How could the enemy have possibly known we were landing here with maps and papers? I felt a choking sensation under the collar of Captain Johan Buchalter's German uniform as I followed the officer into a long wooden building running parallel to the row of hangars. He led me to a rear room and closed the door behind me.

"What is your name?" he demanded sharply.

I told him, forcing my eyes to remain as hard as his own.

"How was our messenger killed?"

His messenger! I wondered later if he attributed my sudden pallor to the recollection of the fight over Somme-Py. I described the encounter with the American Nieuport, placing the scene of combat considerably farther north than the spot where it actually had taken place. I added that my passenger had fastened his bag under his seat—and handed him the portfolio. He rose from his seat in comic haste, seized the dispatch-case and opened it on the desk in front of him.

While he was rapidly scanning some of the papers, I told him that it would be dark within an hour, and that my instructions were to return home to Cambrai immediately. He paid no attention to me. I rose from my chair and moved to the window which overlooked the field.

Captain Loerger's mechanics were refueling my Hanover and tinkering with the spark-plugs. I watched them work, feverishly revolving in my mind some way of absenting myself for a brief few minutes. No use trying to run for it. Too many of Herr Loerger's fast Fokkers with their yellow bellies were coming and going. I couldn't get a mile from here, even if I did get the Hanover up.

My jailer was sorting out the contents of the spy's bag. There were maps, diagrams, lists of names, copies of letters and various papers which from this distance I could not identify. The doughty major's eyes were gleaming with satisfaction.

Suddenly as I stood watching him from the window, the outer door opened without warning. Two officers entered the room. Through the open door I caught a glimpse of a gray touring car close against the building, a neatly clad chauffeur standing beside the open tonneau

door. The noise of the motors on the field had covered its approach.

The short major behind the desk leaped to his feet and stood at attention with his hand to his cap, the papers he had been examining falling in a heap to the floor. I shot one look at the foremost of the two visitors; then my hand too, came to my visor and my heels clicked together in the best Potsdam style. It required no introduction to identify the slender figure in the smart-fitting uniform—that elongated head with a receding chin and startlingly prominent eyes belonged to the Crown Prince, Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia.

Behind him towered the powerful figure of another general. Both stood just over the threshold.

As I stiffened to attention with my back to the window, the Crown Prince spoke impatiently.

"Damn it, Stellings, you are keeping me waiting! General von Einem and His Highness Kronprinz Rupprecht already have arrived. Did you get the American maps you promised?"

"The papers are here, Your Highness," said my major, casting a half glance at the pile on the floor. "I have not fully examined them. My messenger was killed this afternoon, on the way here from Cambrai. This young man,"—indicating me with a glance—"fortunately saved the dispatch-case, and brought it to me."

"From Cambrai!" repeated the Crown Prince, turning and regarding me with interest. "How did your messenger get across the lines into Cambrai?"

If I had attempted to speak, I should have betrayed myself. My brain again was whirling. Major Stellings was the name Lenmann had given me, as our Number Twenty-Seven—yet this Stellings here had just called Number Sixteen *his messenger!*

"Are *those* the papers?" rasped the Crown Prince, suddenly extending his swagger-stick toward the heap on the floor as they caught his eye. "For God's sake, man, stand at ease and pick them up."

"They fell, Your Highness—I was just examining them," mumbled the major. "I will sort them out—"

"Sort nothing out!" interrupted His Highness, impatiently drawing on his yellow gloves and moving to the door. "You have kept me waiting far beyond the hour."

With an agitation as great as my own, Major Stellings dropped to his knee and stuffed Number Sixteen's papers back into his bag. Without a glance at me he hastened after his royal master and banged the door. I saw the royal car disappear around the corner of a hangar as I walked swiftly in the opposite direction to my Hanover. My lower lip, I believe, was trembling a bit as I took off.

IT was exactly two hours after my encounter with the son of the Kaiser that I found myself again ascending the staircase to General Wade's office. Two new bodyguards attended me to the big chief's door. I had had some time to think things over, but still my mind was in a stupor. Anyway I looked at it, I had made a fearful botch of my job. Instead of a promotion, probably I would draw hard labor with the Alemites.

The General and Colonel Ripley were together. My guards were dismissed and I was directed to proceed with my report. I spilled the entire hard-luck story to them, exactly as it happened. General Wade filed his nails without looking at me as I talked, but Colonel Ripley watched my face with widening eyes. When I came to the end he looked over at the big boss with a stupefied countenance.

"My God! What have we done!" he whispered in a shaken voice. The General shot a glance at him, then examined his nails intently. (*Please turn to page 135*)

It's a tough spot for two white men, when they're in the middle of a tong war, hundreds of miles from a Government post.



The Platinum War

By WARREN HASTINGS
MILLER

Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean

SPUTTERING pop of packs of firecrackers, the moaning clamor of gongs, frightful clashes of cymbals struck with venom, a caterwauling chant of hysterical coolies—there was about the same amount of noise within both kampong fences; and Keyte, who was used to the ways of coolies, gathered that there was a first-class war brewing between them.

The Super guessed that it was jealousy. For the Yee Hop Song *tong*, who were building the dam for sluice flumes on the Mas River had no chance for platinum pilferings, while the Chin Lee Hsp *tong*, which panned for ore in the river-bed, had all the chance for velvet though all of them were trusted men. The immediate cause for hostilities, however, was a casual Dyak who had wandered into the Yee Hop Song temple the night before and had taken the head of the old priest there. Not to be partial, he had visited the Chin Lee Hsp temple next, and collected also the head of their holy man. Each *tong* being sure the other had hired him to do it, their China-captains were calling the war powwows that could be heard now.

Poisonous place, Borneo, thought Superintendent Philip Keyte with a regretful shake of the head. He was a large hairy Englishman who never wore a topee. He and Chief Engineer Steve Adams, American, were the only two white men running the Bukit Hijau Platinum Mines, Ltd., here in the far jungles of eastern Borneo. Bukit Hijau, the Green Hill, was syenite platinum matrix and needed hydraulic sluicing, as the river-bed contained only what Nature herself had washed down; hence the dam Steve was building.

It had caused bad blood between the *tongs* from the first. The mere sight of the Chin Lee Hsps waist-deep in the shallow Mas and washing platinum-bearing gravel with conical straw hats and primitive wooden cradles made the Yee Hop Songs see red. For they had to labor with pick, shovel and wheelbarrow, with no chance to steal any rich finds of platinum nuggets. It was not fair, as they viewed it; no chance to get rich, outside of their coolie wages. Yesterday they had left their dam in a body and had descended on the Chin Lee Hsps with war-cries. The latter had repelled boarders by stoning them with about forty thousand dollars' worth of platinum matrix—which was an expensive row as the Corporation's directors would view it!

Decidedly he was fed up, Keyte felt as he listened to this civil war brewing over in the two kampongs. His good-

natured smile and twinkling brown eyes took on a frown of sternness as he strode over to where the works bell hung in a bamboo frame near the corrugated-iron management bungalow. A good ship's bell, that—built to sound through three miles of fog. He struck three booming notes on it, for the irresolute man always gets left, and it was time to do something decisive.

Three long, reverberating peals that could be heard clear to the Dyak kampong of Long Itam down-river, where Dain Bulieng, the Chief of Twenty Doors, was "major" for the Dutch Government all over this district. The signal meant that everyone was to come in: Steve from his dam, the two China-captains from the coolie kampongs to leave off stirring up *tong* violence and come take a proper bawling out, any sub-foreman within hearing to drop everything and report. Keyte expected, however, only his tall, hatchet-faced, sunburned American, who was his main reliance in handling coolies when they went amuck. He had a way with him, had Steve, mostly oblique and lawless—but it got results. The super had no hopes for his two China-captains or the various foremen in charge of the river washings for platinum ore and on dam construction—all busy over at the concert!

Nobody answered but Steve. He appeared presently, wrathful and cursing, then grinned keenly in answer to the Superintendent's smile and wagging head. Just those two; but shoulder to shoulder they had built this place, developed it from a wild jungle river having quartz rubbish in its bed speckled with dull gold, and syenite with pale metallic crystals of *mas kodok*, "frog's gold," as the Malays called platinum. The present extensive organized workings were the result so far.

Yet it had only just begun. The river deposits represented what Nature herself had washed down into the Mas from Bukit Hijau, Green Hill, to translate its name. It came, not from the green jungle brush that covered it, but from the rock base of the hill, which was green syenite, one of the best of platinum matrixes. It was proposed to wash down the rest of it by hydraulic sluicing, and Keyte had already been preparing the terraces and sluice-beds where the ore could be picked and sorted while the lighter dross washed on down. And now both *tongs* of China-coolies had quit work to indulge in the luxury of a free-for-all shindy!

"Fat business!" said Steve as they considered the martial

orgies brewing over in the two kampongs across the river. "We'll lose a lotta good men before it's all over! Any ideas on how to head it off, Chief?"

"None, but to delay it somehow," returned the Super. "We'll have a bit of help in an hour. Listen!"

Distantly through the jungle they could hear the deep, muttered *boom-a-room-boom-boom!* of a great Dyak log drum. That meant that Dain Bulieng, the headman of Long Itam, was calling out the fire department, so to speak. He had heard the Corporation's bell and knew what those three strokes meant. As he was "major," appointed by the Dutch *controleur*, he was responsible for keeping the peace in this district. And that meant that he would come here with all his warriors, armed with *parang-ihlans*, sumpitans, and Singapore muskets, and kill everybody he could. The more trophies for his head-house, the better, in Dain Bulieng's philosophy!

"Cure's worse than the disease, I should say!" Steve laughed as they gathered that the Dyak chieftain also was starting a war. "Bulieng's idea of a good Chinaman is a dead one. We gotta keep the peace ourselves if we want anybody left. And this work just *can't* stop."

They were between the devil and the deep sea, those two lonely white men and they realized that without enthusiasm. At one end of the long chain that reached from here to London and New York was this mine in southeast Borneo that was yielding half an ounce of platinum to the ton by merely primitive native washing in conical straw hats. And at the other end were certain hungry sulphuric-acid stills, the basis of most modern chemical and oil-refining industries. The last step in the reduction of sulphuric acid from iron pyrites is a pan of platinum, twenty inches in diameter and worth about thirty thousand dollars. Occasionally the still-man gets drunk or careless and the flow of concentrated acid into the pan stops. Result, the entire pan melts down in the intense heat. They recover most of the platinum out of the mess of brickwork and coke, but there is always a lost residue. To make this up the world *must* have more platinum to go on at all. Rings, jewelry, fashion's gewgaws—nothing, compared to that industrial need for the precious metal! And since the Soviets have about ruined the great Russian mines that once produced ninety per cent of the world's platinum, it is the mines in the far jungles of Borneo and Brazil that must carry on.

DECIDEDLY there would be panic in both London and New York if this mine stopped, Keyte and Adams perceived in considering their responsibilities to the Corporation. The folks at home were looking for more platinum, not less. Feeble as their output was, the cables from home—delivered by river steamer and canoe—wanted to know, principally, when those hydraulic sluices would be started. Damn the China-boys anyhow, and their private war!

"I fancy if we got hold of the two China-captains and knocked some sense into 'em, it wouldn't be a bad stroke for our side," Keyte offered with a burly grin.

Steve grinned back, keen-eyed, hardy of soul. It would take some doing! But you could learn wisdom from that Dyak who had precipitated all this. If he had removed—innocently enough—the two most powerful influences for peace, those two temple priests, the obvious corollary was to remove the two war heads. Without either China-captain to lead the fray, the *tongs* would simply take it out in noise, unless some other firepot emerged.

"It's the dope!" Steve agreed. "I'll get hold of my man, Sü Lung. What'll we do with 'em?"

"Lock 'em up in Kong Beng. It's not a mile from here," said Keyte nonchalantly. "Then come back and take charge of the Dyak blighter before he begins potting our chaps. May work him in between them somehow and

quiet things off with a show of force. Well, cheerio! Let's get on with it. I'll meet you at the cave with my brute. He hasn't answered the bell, has he? We've a right to call on them and ask why!"

That bit of insubordination against the white management seemed to be the proper peg to hang their visits to the kampongs on. Steve set out for where his own male-factors were at that moment celebrating the impending war with a series of ghastly orchestral effects. The compound lay on the opposite hill above the rapids of the Mas River. About a hundred coolies ate and slept there in a promiscuous state of piggery. There was a little office at the gate where, one by one, they were searched for platinum trifles worth, say, a mere bagatelle of two hundred dollars when returning from work. But beyond that gate Steve had never been. Inside it was the China-captain's territory, his own kingdom, which he ruled as head of the *tong*. How could one pinch the king?

STEVE ruminated on that as he crossed the bamboo bridge over the rapids and glanced upstream once at his abandoned dam with a rueful shake of the head. Sü Lung was busy right now haranguing his *tong* in the temple. If you went in there and put a gun on him, they would tear you limb from limb. You could send in word from the gate, but would get nothing, besides compromising the white man's dignity in these parts. Craft, then? Well, curiosity. It had killed more than one cat!

Steve gained the compound gate. Not a soul around; but a frenzied din came from the temple that centered the rabbit-warren of coolie huts. They slept six in a room in these kennels, and played fan-tan for their wages all night. Pestilent lot; but they were industrious workers by day, even if thievish.

Steve looked around a bit. It would be rank foolhardiness to venture inside there; the thing to do was to make them come out *here*, and take his chance on getting Sü Lung aside somewhere. Also it would have to be a mighty strong note of curiosity to be pretext enough for a word with him in their present mood! And then the idea came. It seemed to Steve that, if *he* were a China-coolie and had found a bit of platinum matrix while picky-shoveling on the dam work, he would cache it somewhere about here before entering this gate to be searched.

The idea grew. What was this war about anyway? Jealousy, because the other *tong* had far more chance at pilferings than they had. Both of them had secret caches, Steve was convinced. They had long since learned that the "frog's gold" was far more valuable than real gold. A man or society could go back to China rich, after indenture in the platinum mines, if things were managed cannily enough.

Where? Here was the beaten trail leading up from the bamboo bridge, trod nightly by hundreds of Celestial feet coming home. A few immense trees shaded it, their white boles far apart. Some distance off the trail, all of them. Steve scanned them for signs of white ants, as that familiar brown scale would tell of hollow wood underneath. Nothing; they were all sound and healthy. But the idea persisted. Something hollow—a pipe? The coolie would be carrying his bit of ore between prehensile toes as he walked up the trail to the gate, would release it, to drop into—Steve made a swift pounce as his eyes suddenly confirmed that reasoning. *Very* ingenious! A tuft of rooty ironwood shoots grew just off the trail and not fifty feet from the compound stockade. Steve kicked it experimentally, just as a coolie would in shuffling along with a nice nugget of platinum in charge of his big toe. As he had surmised, the tuft lifted, hinged by some of its roots, the rest cut away. And underneath was the mouth of a pipe, a vertical shaft of three-inch bamboo with the joints knocked out.

It did not go very far underground, Steve was sure. He hurried to the gate house, grabbed up a spare shovel, and returned to sink a mine shaft of his own. And not two feet below the surface he broke through into a tunnel, just a mole-run along which a man could crawl. The Chinese idea of a communal cache now became clear. Each coolie dropped his pilferings of the day down that bamboo pipe by a casual kick at the tuft. A man crawled along the tunnel and collected the winnings. The *tong* would go back to China rich, if they could get their hoard out of Borneo without its being discovered by the various customs and police officials whose duty it was to head off that very thing. Well, there are a million ways to smuggle it out!

STEVE enlarged his shaft with a few savage thrusts of his shovel and crawled into the tunnel. Counting the arm-reaches of his progress wormwise, he figured fifty feet, then a hundred. There was noise above him now, a confused murmur as of a restless sea. Like the tin mines of Cornwall you could hear it, just above. It grew loud and distinct as the tunnel came to an end; he was in a kind of square pit having box walls above, through which rays of light penetrated various cracks. He stopped, listening and looking around. This was daylight to his eyes, dilated by the long passage in total darkness. And he was squatting on a pile of debris of green syenite matrix, heaps and chips and spalls of it. There was a hammer and a crude Chinese anvil with its stem sunk in the dirt. Men in the secret worked here, crushing out the native metal. They had not left much that was valuable!

Steve sat considering what had become of the platinum and listening to the stamp of a foot above him as Sü Lung yelled out incendiary diatribes at his *tong* in a Cantonese jargon that he himself used in directing coolie work. He conceived that Sü Lung was standing on the platform of the huge Taoist war-god in the temple, and that this pit was directly under it. And that led to another conjecture—why not store the platinum inside the idol and seal up its base with concrete or something when the *tong* went home? No customs men would dare insist on the idol being demolished for search. They would take it home in triumph, with parades all the way, with carpets of exploding fire-crackers for it to move over—a regular Chinese show—then divide the loot when they got it safely back to China.

Characteristic scheme! Steve possessed himself of the hammer and groped softly along the under side of the platform, searching for an entrance into that idol. His arm plunged into empty air presently, a hatch into the belly of the war-god above, his groping hand told him. There was light up there, rays through the eyes and mouth of the carved head with its hideous grimace of curves and wrinkles. He crawled upward noiselessly, his hands finding grab-pegs, shelves—and small canvas bags on the shelves. He hefted one of them. Heavy as lead, for all its small size. About two thousand dollars' worth of pure platinum in each bag, he conjectured! Well, it would have to wait. They would make the *tong* disgorge it later. . . . No! By George, he could stow all six of the bags in his own pockets, they were so small, Steve discovered. They weighed about four pounds apiece.

Steve grinned hardily when that was finished. He was standing up inside the image now, his eyes looking out through its grinning teeth. Sü Lung was not three feet in front of him; beyond him all the temple was crowded with wildly excited men, a sea of fierce slant-eyed yellow faces, a sea of blue coolie blouses, a group of gong and cymbal men directly below the platform who banged their instruments at every point made by the haranguing Sü Lung.

"Curiosity! I'll hand him a hell of a dose of it!" thought Steve as a new plan possessed him with the suddenness of

an electric shock. Sü Lung would be the first man to jump for this secret pit if he knew the platinum cache of his society was in danger. All right, then—

"Sü Lung! Sü Lung!" he growled hoarsely through the war god's mouth. "Look to your platinum bags!" Steve husked in twanging Cantonese. Sü Lung whirled about, then dashed around the idol and in behind it. Steve could hear his running feet as he too dropped down and was crouching in the pit. A small door above opened; then a man was crowding hastily head-first through it. And on that head Steve brought down a judicious blow of the hammer.

He fell like a stone. Steve slammed to the door, seized the prone body and dragged it into the tunnel after him. A complete silence reigned above. The coolies were still wondering why their China-captain had left off speaking so abruptly to run around behind the idol. Steve worked like a dog dragging that inert form after him down the tunnel. He had not much time before they would become suspicious and begin investigating the disappearance of their leader. Yet there was some time. Those in the know would be the first to explore the pit, and they would be some time searching up in the idol before they discovered that their platinum cache was gone. Meanwhile he would be off for Kong Beng with their kidnaped king.

He reached the shaft he had dug, stopped a moment to shovel back the earth. Some one *might* run out to have a look at this end of it. Then he hove Sü Lung up on his shoulder and started off along the jungle trail that led back through the hills to Kong Beng, that cave which all coolies avoided with superstitious awe.

A mile of staggering hard work. Steve had tied up the China-captain by now, but the fellow was conscious and trying to bite him. And then the cave of Kong Beng came in sight, a low, dark arch overgrown with tree ferns and lianas. But inside were wonders, for its vaults rose to unmeasured blackness, inhabited by bats, and under two feet of bat guano was an ancient Hindoo tile floor. For this had been an outpost temple of the great Hindoo empire of the Sixth Century and a solemn circle of Hindoo stone gods was in the central cave of Kong Beng, lit by a hundred-foot shaft of light falling on each in turn through the roof as the sun went around.

KEYTE was waiting for him at the entrance with his man as Steve came gasping up, bearing his burden. "I say! You had trouble with him, what?" the Super offered, his jovial face a wrinkle of grins. "My blighter was docile enough! Says his *tong* is the aggrieved party."

"I'll say I had!" said Steve wrathfully, and told him briefly of that platinum cache and the kidnaping of Sü Lung, present and accounted for, on his shoulder.

"My sainted aunt! Put the wind up, that will!" commented Keyte with a low whistle of dismay. "And, I wonder—" He was looking suspiciously at his own beauty of a China-captain now. That *tong*, too, had a private cache of its own, or it was poor in spirit compared to Steve's! Also it had much more chance at the loot, being engaged entirely in stream-bed washings. Nice, faithful lot of workmen! Borneo's finest, so to speak.

"Well, let's get on with it," said Keyte after some futile speculation over his man. From around his mighty waistline he uncoiled about forty feet of rope. "Tie 'em to the idols in there, so they won't bite each other, what?" And the Super grinned on Steve cheerfully.

They entered Kong Beng and were immediately swallowed up in its cavernous darkness. The whistle of bat-wings four feet across, squeaks and cries full of indignation and venom, passed and swerved low overhead as Kong Beng's inhabitants protested the invasion. They felt their

way over the guano, trying to keep to the cleared path on the tile made by a Dutch archeologist some years before. Bends and turns—one particularly bad place where you slipped off into a bottomless lake of black waters if not very careful. And then a dim light ahead, a ragged arch giving on a vast rotunda where stood the Elder Gods. It was eerie yet solemn and awe-inspiring, this cave temple. The great shaft slanted down in a hundred-foot beam of light from a natural hole in the roof, and the sun's rays now fell on the image of Shiva, a twelve-foot Hindoo carving. Around him in a portentous circle stood Vishnu, Kali, Ganesh, Hanuman, all the twelve Greater Gods—had stood there for thirteen centuries since men had worshiped here. Abandoned, forgotten, the red star of Islam with its creed of Allah, the One, had wiped out the older faith all over Malaya.

The sun shaft was leaving Shiva for Hanuman as they stood spell-bound for the time under the sorcery of this place. Keyte gave a characteristic grunt and remarked: "Shiva, the Destroyer; Hanuman, the Builder—sun's favoring our side, what?"

Steve hoped it was prophetic of luck for the builders—his race of engineers; he borrowed a half of Keyte's rope and tied Sü Lung securely to the statue of Kali. The Englishman laughed at the apt selection—that god whose sacrifice is human blood—and tied his man to Ganesh, the god of wealth.

"The blighter ought to be pleased, rather!" he said jovially. "I'll lay you a quid he has a hoard twice your man's hidden somewhere! Maybe he'll tell Ganesh about it."

"It's too damned significant to be funny," Steve growled, not responding to the joviality. He was positively afraid to encounter Sü Lung's eyes in the spell of this place. The man chewed at his gag in silence but his slant eyes were mere slits of glittering malevolence. His and the hideous frown of Kali were one as they stared on Steve. The China-captain had thought it all out while being carried helpless here. Those heavy bulges in the chief engineer's pockets were his society's bags of loot. And his eyes never left them now as they boiled with eloquent rage. It was Steve's voice through the mouth of the war god that had tricked him into that hasty entrance through the pit door. He was the thief of three months of the society's thriftily stored findings, as Sü Lung viewed him! And his life was no safer than the reach of a long knife from now on.

"Cheerio!" said the Super, obtuse to all such vain imaginings. "We'll have a go at Dain Bulieng, the Chief of Twenty Doors, next. We can intercept the bally Dyak police force by a jog trot for the river. Come along!"

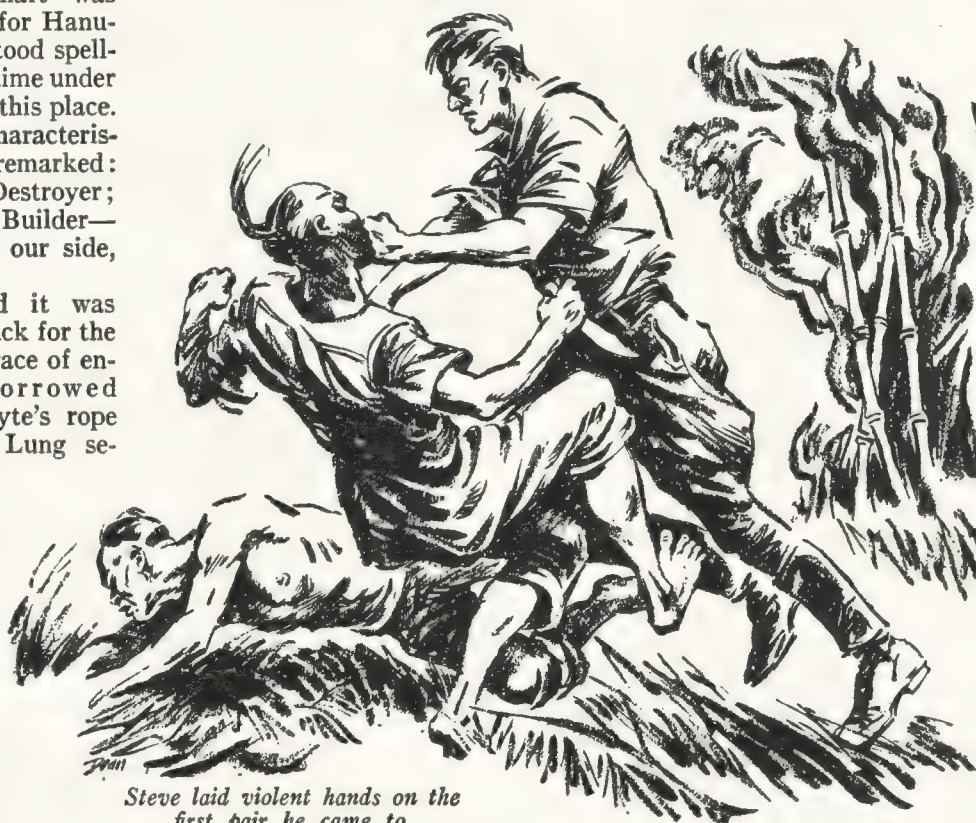
Steve groped his way out of Kong Beng behind him, think hard.

Gosh, he reflected, he *had* put the wind up and no mistake by rifling the hoard of platinum—if Sü Lung's eyes spoke truly! It was the Corporation's property, of course; but in a way it was theirs, a sort of backsheesh eking out their miserable coolie wages, as they regarded it; it was lag-niappe—something extra, for hard work faithfully done. And a byproduct, too, of digging and shoveling for the dam, platinum pickings from a stream-bed already worked out by the washers and tacitly abandoned by the Corporation for a dam site.

Compared to his men, that other slick *tong* who were more trusted yet had without doubt a similar hoard that the Super had *not* found—it made Steve's blood boil in

rebellion! It was not fair! His *tong* would go home poor as they came; the trusted ore-washers would get away with their loot in triumph. Decidedly his sympathies were leaning toward his own men—the damned rascals!—and it would be well to have a card for them up his sleeve.

Accordingly Steve watched his chance while the Super was tramping on ahead and slipped all but one of his six bags into a convenient cleft in the huge tumble of rocks around the entrance of Kong Beng. A tree fern marked it so he could find them



Steve laid violent hands on the first pair he came to.

again. After that he felt better—lighter in heart and body. There was no telling how this war was coming out; but one thing was certain, his own men would no longer work for him but would instead seek his life—unless he had something to compromise with. Compromise, that was it. Nothing could be done in the day's work without it, men being what they were.

There was anything but compromise in Dain Bulieng's hard Dyak face when they encountered him marching up the river trail with forty warriors at his back. He heard out Keyte's jocular description of the impending coolie row, his stern little almond eyes and pursed mouth immovable upon the big Englishman's face. A naked, short and sturdy customer was the Chief of Twenty Doors—the twenty board-rooms of his great Dyak communal house on piles each containing a family. Three golden crescents hung by a system of chains about his neck and proclaimed his rank. A plain collar with a Dutch medal on it was his badge of authority as "major" appointed by the Governor-general to keep the peace in this district. Because of that medal you had to deal tactfully with Dain Bulieng. The Corporation itself was but two foreigners and a gang of

coolies, subject, in a way, to his authority. If the coolies were now fighting among themselves, go to, then!

He grunted, sniffed, as the Super concluded his recital of what had been done so far, then barked an order down the line of his men strung along the jungle trail. Instantly keen *parang-ihlans* flashed out of their scabbards, quivers were opened and darts drawn from them to load into the long sumpitans; those that had Singapore muskets put percussion caps on their nipples.

"Oh, I say, Chief!" protested Keyte. "I don't want you to pitch into the lot, y'know! It's a long business gettin' more coolies up-river!"

DAIN BULIENG tapped his medal. He was sheriff here. That gesture reminded the two men. A Dyak sheriff; but the Sultan down at Samarinda would approve whatever he did. The Dutch might growl, later, but that would not bring back any dead coolies. However—and that is how one writes a sigh—there was nothing to be done about it now. They went along with the Chief at the fast quick-step of his brawny Dyaks. A wild and barbarous police force they were, glistening brown bodies, ornaments of human hair in bracelets on arms and legs. Elaborate blue tattooing, embroidered girdles having long tails before and behind, tight turbans with rhinoceros hornbill feathers stuck in them—these decorations composed their uniform. Shields, spears, parangs; yes, a police force—but it was like putting out a fire by tearing the whole house apart to set them on the Corporation's coolies.

Smoke, rising over the jungle ahead in dense black volumes. The party quickened their pace. As they came under the flanks of Bukit Hijau and passed the long lines of wooden troughs that Keyte was building for sluice-washings when Steve's dam was ready, a deafening caterwaul of screeches, yells, obscene squalls of Cantonese smote their ears. They were hard at it already, the two *tongs*! Keyte led the race around the bend made by the river under Bukit Hijau. Across it came in sight a burning kampong—that of the river-washers; and it was a mess, a mob of whirling and clawing blue figures, pigtailed being yanked in the flames, a pall of smoke everywhere, violence, individual choking-matches, here and there the gleam of a knife.

The center of the row seemed to be a great dry clump of bamboo that grew within the kampong fence, the latter now utterly obliterated. The clump was blazing fiercely, also exploding like musketry as the flames overheated its joints. And a cloud of sparkling metallic stuff was spewing from those joints—platinum nuggets for which men fought and bit and tore at each other, some wrenching at the bamboo, others fighting them off it—the Chin Lee Hsp's cache of loot!

Steve laughed hysterically as they all stopped for a moment to watch.

"Your mugs' cache, Keyte—and the fire's showing it up! Go it, my side!" He was doubled up, was Steve, for he guessed that his *tong* on finding their idol cache and Chinacaptain both mysteriously vanished,—and a warning uttered by their war god to boot,—had descended on the Super's trustworthy washers in a body, fired the fence to get in at them, and *that* had disclosed this gorgeous bamboo cache of their sanctimonious lootings from the river-bed.

Keyte grinned. "My word! It will repay washing over, that kampong site, what? Not a rotter of them will have an ounce left on him when they all get through! It's a jolly platinum mine in itself—eh, what!"

Both white men were inclined to let the battle rage. There would be a lot of cracked skulls, damaged pigtailed, and broken bones to patch up, but the works would still have its coolies. Dain Bulieng, however saw a chance for heads here and was not going to pass it up. His fierce

little eyes burned like a ferret's as he flashed out his long, heavy steel parang. "Forward!" he ordered his men.

Steve had a sickening revulsion at sight of that line of steel starting for across the river. This was just a peaceful coolie row compared to the carnage those parangs would deal out! If let alone, the Chinks would stop for sheer lack of wind presently, and Chinese-fashion, settle on a compromise of some sort, after everyone had had a good breather of a scrap and a portion of the loot—Keyte's people's loot. The Dutch Government's forces of law and order were altogether too deadly here!

"Come on, Keyte! Grab all your men you can—we gotta get 'em out of this if we can!" yelled Steve with that resolution formed. He led in the rush after the advancing Dyaks and they caught up with Dain Bulieng.

"One moment, Chief!" said Keyte hastily. "Give us a chance with them, what? I say—beastly go, beheadin' all our poor blighters, wouldn't it be?" He flashed that rugged and genial smile of his. The Chief blinked, halted his men reluctantly, but the cheerful smile had done it, more than Steve's grim and anxious look of remonstrance. If the Tuans wished to risk their lives over there, it was none of *his* responsibility, the Chief's glowering countenance told him sulkily. But he would be close behind them, he insisted. The Sultan would frown if either of them got hurt with the entire police force from Long Itam looking on.

"Quite," agreed Keyte. "Come along with us, Steve!" They crossed the foot-bridge to the washers' kampong, ascended the hill to barge in on the coolie battle. It was still flourishing, two hundred absolutely crazy Chinamen seeing red with rage and loot, struggling like a football rush in the pall of smoke. They were paying no attention to the line of Dyak steel coming up the hill behind their two white bosses; they paid no attention to either Steve or Keyte as they stalked in on the row. The Englishman was wasting no words on either side. *Biff—swat—bam*—his fists lunged in impartially, knocking flat all he could reach.

Steve laid violent hands on the first pair he came to—one of his own sub-foremen locked in a strangle-grip with one of Keyte's people. Arms like rigid steel, talon fingers tough as roots clinched around skinny throats in a death-grip that was sheer endurance as to who would pass out first. The pair swayed as one under the yank of Steve's arm. His shouts in their ears were nothing, his attempts to tear them apart futile. Steve himself was now the center of a screaming mob that caromed against him from all sides and were deaf to his tones of authority. Ever try to separate two men who have gone mad with fury? It was like that, hopeless the voice of reason! Steve gave it up and adopted Keyte's tactics, swatting right and left, all he could reach. It was the only medicine, for the time!

AND presently they began to have effect, just the two of them. The stiff hook to the jaw, the crashing right behind the ear; it meant a peaceful coolie every trip—one that lay like a log where he fell. The burning bamboo clump was now but a circle of smoking stumps, every vestige of it having been torn apart for the loot that it contained. It was still the center of the fight, but Keyte and Steve had possession of it now, a ring of the more belligerent prone around them, the rest gathered into two rather distinct parties, the dam *tong* and the washer *tong*. There were still whirlpools of fighting coolies agitating the mass. But now that most of them were among friends of either *tong*, they had time to look around.

And the sight was rather chilling to one's blood. A ring of steel was looking at them with the fierce, murderous Dyak eye—a ring of gleaming blades, of spears, of muskets. It wanted but a word from somebody, and these warriors would begin to collect heads with enthusiasm—



The burning kampong was a mob of whirling, clawing figures, individual choking-matches, here and there the gleam of a knife.

Chinese heads, pigtails and all, whose corpses would never go back whole to China to be worshiped by pious descendants! A perceptible shiver went through the lot as that thought gripped them with all its ghastly implications. *Anything* sooner than not become an object for ancestor-worship, however humble the coolie! And they could see plainly that it was only the Super's outstretched arm that kept the Dyak chieftain from jumping into it with his forty formidable warriors. They capered with fear at the sight, and gathered still more into two distinct *tongs*.

Steve guessed that cause of dismay from the apprehension in all those slant eyes. He spoke rapidly to Keyte: "Now's the time, Super! If you don't mind expending a few thousand that is velvet to the Company, anyway? I can fix this for good! They've earned a bit extra, you'll allow," he appealed. "Let's give 'em the damned stuff!"

Keyte nodded. "Do what you like—only quiet 'em before yon Dyak murders the lot!" he gasped, still breathing heavily, and with a belligerent Chink's arm in either fist. "The Corporation can jolly well afford it!"

Steve held up one arm commanding attention, and drew forth one bag of platinum loot from a pocket. At sight of it there was a hoarse screech from all his own *tong*, a rush toward him that recoiled hastily as the ring of Dyaks threatened with their parangs. Steve grinned on them. "Six," he called out. "I've got 'em all—safe!"

They stood staring, all the glittering slant eyes fixed on him and that bag, faces vacant, ugly. "You—thick—mugs!" thundered Steve upon them. You had to go it slow with coolies, one idea at a time, please! A grin broke here and there. When the captain-boss called them that, it meant that he was not angry, only displeased over something that ought to be obvious to the intelligence of a frog.

"Why-for you make bad hell longa Chin Lee *tong*?" Steve addressed them in pidgin-English. "Him 'e no catch'm *your* cache!" He paused a while to let the enormity of their guilt sink in. Every minute was valuable now, for they were all rapidly cooling off, and even the Dyaks were beginning to get accustomed to the idea that there would be no heads today—distasteful as that was to Dain Bulieng! More grins broke among the gaping faces of his own *tong*. Their own loot was safe, according to the Captain-boss; and they had handfuls of the Chin Lee Hsp's to boot. The latter growled, were looking appealingly at Keyte to do something for their side.

The Super smiled placidly.

"Priceless, old thing!" he told Steve in an aside. "It's a masterpiece, so far—my word!"

STEVE knew his coolies. "All right, I make'm finish-pidgin," he declared with decision. "You-feller loot, they-feller loot, all-same *one*!" He waved the bag and pointed to the remains of the bamboo cache of the Chin Lee Hsps which *tong* yelled, pleased. His own men glowered over this judgment but Steve went on, forcefully: "Everybody come office bimeby and get his share, you sabby? All-same both cache I make divide!"

Another pause. You could not go too fast with this idiot people. But his stern eyes on them told them that this was the boss' word. And the ring of eager Dyaks around them counseled that they had best think it over before making any howl.

To Keyte's astonishment (*Please turn to page 136*)

The Story So Far:

INTO the domain of Tarzan of the Apes came a party of European agents, plotting to dominate the world with communism. Peter Zveri, a burly Russian, was the leader; and he brooked neither opposition nor suggestions from anyone save Zora Drinov, a beautiful Russian girl who was his confidential secretary. The remainder of the party was composed of two other Russians, Michael Dorsky and Paul Ivitch; a Mexican, Miguel Romero; the Sheik Abu Batu and his Arab warriors, temporarily loyal to communism because of their lust for loot and hatred of British authority; Kitembo, an African chieftain with his black Galla warriors, who sought to regain power lost through British rule; and Wayne Colt, a reputedly wealthy American, who was supposed to lend prestige to the cause. Their first decisive step was an attempt to obtain the fabled gold of Opar.

This much Tarzan knew. He had spied on the encampment while the party made a foray on Opar, leaving in the camp Zora and a Hindu, Raghunath Jafar. The Hindu had attempted to make advances to the girl, who was saved by the appearance of Wayne Colt and his followers, the last to join the expedition. In vengeance, the Hindu attempted to ambush Colt, and Tarzan had killed him with an arrow. Later Tarzan exhumed the Hindu's body and threw the corpse in the midst of the camp, terrifying the natives.

Tarzan hurried away through the jungle to warn the Oparians of the armed approach. He had been friendly with the high priestess La, whom he had years before reestablished in her rightful place on the throne; and through her he held friendly relations with the Opar warriors and priests.

On entering the city, however, he was unexpectedly attacked from behind and made prisoner. He learned that Oah, La's deadly enemy, had dethroned and imprisoned La, and established herself on the throne with the high priest Dooth.

While Tarzan was held in an underground dungeon, the scouting party, led by Zveri, advanced on Opar. The Arab warriors were frightened away and the party retired precipitately.

Meanwhile Wayne Colt and Zora become friends, and on Zveri's return to camp Zora did not tell him that Colt had sent a message to the Coast. Zveri tried to extract a promise from Zora that she would love only him; he told her that what he really wanted was to rule Africa as emperor, with her as empress—nothing short of this power would be adequate expression of his love. But, he added warningly, if she disclosed this purpose to anyone, he would kill her.

With this threat, he led his party in another advance upon Opar, leaving Zora at the camp with the Sheik Abu Batu, and his warriors. The Sheik felt resentful toward Zveri for this aspersion upon his courage, and he sat looking calculatingly at Zora, meditating revenge.

Of this second advance Tarzan knew nothing. All his energies had been spent on escape. In going from dungeon to dungeon, he escaped a lion and subsequently found La. They planned to recapture the throne from Oah—and took a loyal old priest into their confidence. In some way they



TARZAN

The invaders of the jungle unsuccessfully attack the fearsome stronghold of Opar—while back in their camp, treachery and double-dealing run rampant.

were betrayed and were forced to fight their way out, and flee for their lives from Opar.

That night they slept in a great tree in the forest. At dawn Tarzan awoke to find a storm approaching. He looked into La's rudely constructed cot and saw that she was still asleep; then, swinging to a near-by tree, he set out upon a search for food before the storm broke. (*The story continues in detail:*)

AS Tarzan moved up-wind through the middle terrace, every faculty of his delicately attuned senses was alert. Like the lion, Tarzan particularly relished the flesh of Pacco the zebra, though either Bara the antelope or Horta the boar would have proven an acceptable substitute; but the forest seemed to be deserted by every member of the herds he sought. Only the scent-spoor of the great cats assailed his nostrils, mingled with the lesser and more human odor of Manu the monkey.

Time means little to a hunting beast; it meant little to Tarzan who, having set out in search of meat, would return only when he had found meat.

When La awakened it was some time before she could



The great apes of To-yat were engaged in the death-dance of the Dum Dum.

Guard of the Jungle

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

place her surroundings, but when she did a slow smile of happiness and contentment parted her lovely lips, revealing an even row of perfect teeth. She sighed; then she murmured the name of the man she loved.

"Tarzan!" she called.

There was no reply. Again she spoke his name, but this time louder. Again the only answer was silence. Slightly troubled, she arose upon an elbow and leaned over the side of her sleeping couch.

The tree beneath her was empty.

She thought, correctly, that perhaps he had gone to hunt, but still she was troubled by his absence and the longer she waited the more troubled she became. She knew that he did not love her and that she must be a burden to him. She knew too that he was as much a wild beast as the lions of the forest and that the same desire for freedom, which animated them, must animate him. Perhaps he had been unable to withstand the temptation longer and while she slept, he had left her.

There was not a great deal in the training or ethics of La of Opar that could have found exception to such conduct, for the life of her people was a life of ruthless selfish-

ness and cruelty. They entertained few of the finer sensibilities of civilized man, or the great nobility of character that marked so many of the wild beasts.

La's love for Tarzan had been the only soft spot in her savage life, and realizing that she would think nothing of deserting a creature she did not love, she was fair enough to cast no reproaches upon Tarzan for having done the thing

that she might have done in similar circumstances—nor to her mind did it ill accord with her conception of his nobility of character.

As she descended to the ground she sought to determine some plan of action for the future, but in this moment of loneliness and depression she saw no alternative but to return to Opar. And so it was toward the city of her birth that she turned her steps; but she had not gone far before she realized the danger and futility of this plan, which could but lead to certain death while Oah and Dooth ruled in Opar.

She felt bitter toward the old priest Darus, whom she believed had betrayed her, and accepting his treason as an index of what she might expect from others whom she had believed to be friendly to her, she realized the utter hopelessness of her position in so far as regaining the throne of Opar without outside help was concerned. La had no happy life to which she might look forward, but the will to live was yet strong within her—more the result, perhaps, of the courageousness of her spirit than of any fear of death, which to her was but another word for defeat.

She paused in the trail that she had reached a short dis-

tance from the tree in which she had spent the night and there, with almost nothing to guide her, she sought to determine in what direction she should break a new trail into the future—for wherever she went, other than back to Opar, it would be a new trail, leading among peoples and experiences as foreign to her as though she had suddenly stepped from another planet, or from the long-lost continent of her progenitors.

It occurred to her that perhaps there might be other people in this strange world as generous and chivalrous as Tarzan. At least in this direction there lay hope. In Opar there was none; so she turned back away from Opar and above her black clouds rolled and billowed as the storm king marshaled his forces—and behind her a great tawny beast with gleaming eyes slunk through the underbrush beside the trail that she followed.

CHAPTER VIII

IN FUTILE SEARCH

TARZAN of the Apes, ranging far in search of food, caught at length the welcome scent of Horta the boar. The man paused and with a deep inhalation filled his lungs with air until his great bronzed chest expanded to the full. The blood coursed through his veins, as every fiber of his being reacted to the exhilaration of the moment—the keen delight of the hunting beast that has scented its quarry! Then swiftly and silently he sped in the direction of his prey.

Presently he came upon it, a young tusker, powerful and agile, his wicked tusks gleaming as he tore bark from a young tree. The ape-man was poised just above him, concealed by the foliage of a great tree.

A vivid flash of lightning broke from the billowing black clouds above. The storm broke; at the same instant the man launched himself on the boar, grasping in one hand the hunting knife of his long-dead sire.

The weight of the man's body crushed the boar to the earth; before he could struggle to his feet again, the keen blade had severed his jugular. His life-blood gushing from the wound, the boar sought to rise and turn to fight, but the steel thews of the ape-man dragged him down and an instant later, with a last convulsive shudder, Horta died.

Leaping to his feet, Tarzan placed a foot upon the carcass of his kill and raising his face to the heavens, gave voice to the victory-cry of the bull-ape.

Faintly to the ears of marching men came the hideous scream. The blacks in the party halted, wide-eyed.

"What the devil was that?" demanded Zveri.

"It sounded like a panther," said Colt.

"That was no panther," said Kitembo. "It was the cry of a bull-ape who has made a kill, or—"

"Or what?" demanded Zveri.

Kitembo looked fearfully in the direction from which the sound had come. "Let us get away from here," he said.

Again the lightning flashed and the thunder crashed and as the torrential rain deluged them, the party staggered on in the direction of the barrier cliffs of Opar. . . .

Cold and wet, La of Opar crouched beneath a great tree that only partially protected her almost naked body from the fury of the storm. In the dense underbrush a few yards from her a tawny carnivore lay with unblinking eyes fixed steadily upon her.

The storm, titanic in its brief fury, passed on, leaving the deep worn trail a tiny torrent of muddy water and La, thoroughly chilled, hastened onward in an effort to woo new warmth to her chilled body.

She knew that trails must lead somewhere and in her heart she hoped that this one would lead to the country of

Tarzan. If she could live there, seeing him occasionally, she would be content. Even knowing that he was near her would be better than nothing. Of course she had no conception of the immensity of the world she trod. A knowledge even of the extent of the forest that surrounded her would have appalled her.

In her imagination she visualized a small world, dotted with the remains of ruined cities like Opar, in which dwelt creatures like those she had known—gnarled and knotted men like the priests of Opar, white men like Tarzan, black men such as she had seen, and great shaggy gorillas like Bolgani, who had ruled in the Valley of the Palace of Diamonds.

Thinking these thoughts, she came at last to a clearing into which the unbroken rays of the warm sun poured without interruption. Near the center of the clearing was a small boulder and toward this she made her way with the intention of basking in the warm rays of the sun until she should be dried and warmed, for the dripping foliage had kept her wet and cold even after the rain had ceased.

As she seated herself she saw a movement at the edge of the clearing ahead of her and an instant later a great leopard bounded into view. The beast paused at sight of the woman, evidently as much surprised as she, and then, apparently realizing the defenselessness of this unexpected prey, the creature crouched and with twitching tail slowly wormed itself forward.

La rose and drew the knife that she had taken from Darus from her girdle. She knew that flight was futile. In a few bounds the great beast could overtake her and even had there been a tree that she could have reached before she was overtaken, it would have proven no sanctuary from a leopard.

Defense she knew to be also futile, but surrender without battle was not within the fiber of La of Opar.

The metal discs, elaborately wrought by the hands of some long-dead goldsmith of ancient Opar, rose and fell above her firm breast as her heart beat, perhaps a bit more



Behind her a tawny beast with gleaming eyes slunk through the underbrush beside the trail.

rapidly, beneath them. On came the leopard. She knew that in an instant he would charge; then of a sudden he rose to his feet, his back arched, his mouth grinning in a fearful snarl, and simultaneously a tawny streak whizzed by her from behind and she saw a great lion leap upon her would-be destroyer.

At the last instant, but too late, the leopard had turned to flee. The lion seized him by the back of the neck and with his jaws and one great paw he twisted the head back until the spine snapped. Then, almost contemptuously, he cast the body from him and turned toward the girl.

In an instant La realized what had happened. The lion had been stalking her and seeing another about to seize his prey, he had leaped to battle in its defense. She had been saved, though only to fall victim immediately to another and more terrible beast.

The lion stood looking at her. She wondered why he did not charge and claim his prey. She did not know that within that little brain the scent of the woman had aroused the memory of another day, when Tarzan had lain bound upon the sacrificial altar of Opar with Jad-bal-ja, the Golden Lion, standing guard above him. A woman had come—this same woman. Tarzan his master had told him not to harm her—and she had approached and cut the bonds that secured him.

This Jad-bal-ja remembered and he remembered too that he was not to harm this woman and if he was not to harm her, then nothing must harm her. For this reason he had killed Sheeta the leopard.

But all this La of Opar did not know, for she had not recognized Jad-bal-ja. She merely wondered how much longer it would be—and when the lion came closer she steeled herself, for still she meant to fight; yet there was something in his attitude that she could not understand. He was not charging; he was merely walking toward her, and when he was a couple of yards from her he half turned away and lay down and yawned.

For what seemed an eternity to the girl she stood there watching him. He paid no attention to her. Could it be that, sure of his prey and not yet hungry, he merely waited until he was quite ready to make his kill? The idea was horrible and even La's iron nerves commenced to weaken beneath the strain.

She knew she could not escape, and so better instant death than this suspense. She determined, therefore, to end the matter quickly and to discover once and for all whether the lion considered her already his prey or would permit her to depart.

Gathering all the forces of self-control that she possessed, she placed the point of her dagger to her heart and walked boldly past the lion. Should he attack her she would end the agony instantly by plunging the blade into her heart.

Jad-bal-ja did not move, but with lazy, half-closed eyes he watched the woman cross the clearing and disappear beyond the turn of the trail that wound its way back into the jungle. . . .

All that day La moved on with grim determination, looking always for a ruined city like Opar, astonished by the immensity of the forest, appalled by its loneliness. Surely, she thought, she must soon come to the country of Tarzan! She found fruits and tubers to allay her hunger and as the trail descended a valley in which a river ran, she did not want for water. But night came again and still no sight of man or city. Once again she crept into a tree to sleep, but this time there was no Tarzan to fashion a couch for her or to watch over her safety.

wise would have been, but notwithstanding this he realized long before he reached his destination that his hunting had taken him much farther afield than he had imagined.

When at last he reached the tree and found that La was not there, he was slightly disconcerted, but thinking that perhaps she had descended to stretch her limbs after the storm he called her name aloud several times. Receiving no answer, he became genuinely apprehensive for her safety, and dropping to the ground sought some trace of her. It so happened that beneath the tree her footprints were still visible, not having been entirely obliterated by the rain, and he saw that they led back in the direction of Opar, so that, although he lost them when they reached the trail, in which water still was running, he was none the less confident that he knew her intended destination and so he set off in the direction of the barrier cliff.

It was not difficult for him to account for her absence and for the fact that she was returning to Opar and he reproached himself for his thoughtlessness in having left her for so long a time without first telling her of his purpose. He guessed, rightly, that she had imagined herself deserted and had turned back to the only home she knew, to the only place in the world where La of Opar might hope to find friends; but that she would find them even there Tarzan doubted and he was determined that she must not go back until she could do so with a force of warriors sufficiently great to insure the overthrow of her enemies.

It had been Tarzan's plan first to thwart the scheme of the party whose camp he had discovered in his dominion and then to return with La to the country of his Waziri,



Before the boar could struggle to his feet, the keen blade severed his jugular.

AFTER Tarzan had slain the boar, he cut off the hind-quarters and started back to the tree in which he had left La. The storm made his progress slower than it other-

where he would gather a sufficient body of those redoubtable warriors to insure the safety and success of La's return to Opar.

Never communicative, he had neglected to explain his purpose to La and this he now regretted, since he was quite certain that had he done so she would not have felt it necessary to have attempted to return alone to Opar.

But he was not much concerned with the outcome, since he was confident that he could overtake her long before she reached the city and, inured as he was to the dangers of the forest and the jungle, he minimized their importance, as we do those which confront us daily in the ordinary course of our seemingly humdrum existence, where death threatens us quite as constantly as it does the denizens of the jungle.

MOMENTARILY expecting to catch sight of La, Tarzan slowly traversed the back trail to the foot of the rocky escarpment that guards the plain of Opar. Now he commenced to have his doubts for it did not seem possible that La could have covered so great a distance in so short a time. He scaled the cliff and came out upon the summit of the flat mountain that overlooked distant Opar. Here only a light rain had fallen the storm having followed the course of the valley below. Plain in the trail were the footprints of himself and La where they had passed down from Opar the night before, but nowhere was there any sign of spoor to indicate that the girl had returned, nor, as he looked out across the valley, was there any moving thing in sight.

What had become of her? Where could she have gone? In the great forest that spread below him there were countless trails. Somewhere below her spoor must be plain in the freshly wet earth, but he realized that even for him it might prove a long and difficult task to pick it up again.

Rather sorrowfully he turned back to descend the barrier cliff and as he did so his attention was attracted by a movement at the edge of the forest below. Dropping to his belly behind a low bush, Tarzan watched the spot to which his attention had been attracted. Warily he gazed as the head of a column of men debouched from the forest and moved toward the foot of the cliff.

Tarzan had known nothing of what had transpired upon the occasion of Zveri's first expedition to Opar, which had occurred while he had been incarcerated in the cell beneath the city. The apparent mysterious disappearance of the party that he had known to have been marching on Opar had mystified him; but here it was again—where it had been in the meantime was of no moment.

Tarzan wished that he had his bow and arrow that the Oparians had taken from him and which he had not had an opportunity to replace since he had escaped from them. But if he did not have them there were other ways of annoying the invaders.

From his position he watched them approach the cliff and commence the ascent.

Tarzan selected a large boulder, many of which were strewn about the flat top of the mountain, and when the leaders of the party were about halfway to the summit and the others were strung out below them, the ape-man pushed the rock over the edge of the cliff just above them.

In its descent it just grazed Zveri, struck a protuberance beyond him, bounded over Colt's head and carried two of Kitembo's warriors to death at the base of the escarpment.

The ascent stopped instantly. Several of the blacks who had accompanied the first expedition started a hasty retreat and utter disorganization and rout faced the expedition, whose nerves had become more and more sensitive the nearer they approached Opar.

"Stop the damn' cowards!" shouted Zveri to Dorsky and Ivitch, who were bringing up the rear. "Who will volunteer to go over the top and investigate?"

"I'll go," said Romero.

"And I'll go with him," said Colt.

"Who else?" demanded Zveri; but no one else volunteered. Already the Mexican and the American were climbing upward.

"Cover our advance with a few rifles," Colt shouted back to Zveri. "That ought to keep them away from the edge."

Zveri issued instructions to several of the askaris who had not joined in the retreat. When their rifles commenced popping it put new heart into those who had started to flee, and presently Dorsky and Ivitch had rallied the men and the ascent was resumed.

Quite aware that he could not stop the advance single-handed, Tarzan had withdrawn quickly along the edge of the cliff to a spot where tumbled masses of granite offered concealment and where he knew there existed a precipitous trail to the bottom of the cliff. Here he could remain and watch, or, if necessary, make a hasty retreat. He saw Romero and Colt reach the summit and immediately recognized the latter as the man he had seen in the base camp of the invaders. Tarzan had previously been impressed by the appearance of the young American and now he acknowledged his unquestioned bravery and that of his companion in leading a party over the summit of the cliff in the face of an unknown danger.

Romero and Colt looked quickly about them, but there was no enemy in sight and this word they passed back to the ascending company.

From his point of vantage Tarzan watched the expedition surmount the summit of the cliff and start upon its march toward Opar. He believed that they could never find the treasure-vaults and now that La was not in the city, he was not concerned with the fate of those who had turned against her. Upon the bare and inhospitable Oparian plain, or in the city itself, they could accomplish little in furthering the objects of the expedition he had overheard Zora Drinov explaining to Colt. He knew that eventually they must return to their base camp and in the meantime he would prosecute his search for La; and so as Zveri led his expedition once again toward Opar, Tarzan of the Apes slipped over the edge of the barrier cliff and descended swiftly to the forest below.

Just inside the forest and upon the bank of the river was an admirable camp site and having noticed that the expedition was accompanied by no porters, Tarzan naturally assumed that they had established a temporary camp within striking distance of the city. It occurred to him that in this camp he might find La a prisoner.

AS he had expected, he found the camp located upon the spot where upon other occasions he had camped with his Waziri warriors.

And old thorn *boma* that had encircled it for years had been repaired by the newcomers and within it a number of rude shelters had been erected while in the center stood the tents of the white men. Porters were dozing in the shade of the trees; a single askari made a pretense of standing guard, while his fellows lolled at their ease, their rifles at their sides. But nowhere could he see La or Opar.

He moved downwind from the camp, hoping to catch her scent spoor if she was there, but so strong was the smell of smoke and the body odors of the blacks that he could not be sure but that these drowned La's scent if she was a prisoner in the camp. He decided therefore to wait until darkness had fallen when he might make a more careful investigation and he was further prompted to this decision by the sight of weapons, which he sorely needed. All of



A tawny streak whizzed by her from behind, and she saw a great lion leap upon her would-be destroyer.

the warriors were armed with rifles, but some, clinging through force of ancient habit to the weapons of their ancestors, carried also bows and arrows and in addition there were many spears.

As a few mouthfuls of the raw flesh of Horta had constituted the only food that had passed Tarzan's lips for almost two days, he was ravenously hungry. With the discovery that La had disappeared, he had cached the hind-quarter of the boar in the tree in which they had spent the night, before setting out upon his fruitless search for her. So now, while he waited for darkness, he hunted again and this time Bara the antelope fell a victim to his prowess, nor did he leave the carcass of his kill until he had satisfied his hunger. Then he lay up in a near-by tree and slept.

THE anger of Abu Batu against Zveri was rooted deeply in his inherent racial antipathy for Europeans and their religion, and its growth was stimulated by the aspersions which the Russian had cast upon the courage of the Aarab and his followers.

"Dog of a Nasrâny!" ejaculated the Sheik. "He called us cowards, we Bedaüwy, and he left us here like old men and boys to guard the camp and the woman!"

"He is but an instrument of Allah," said one of the Aarabs, "in the great cause that will rid Africa of all Nasrâny."

"*Wellah-billah!*" ejaculated Abu Batu. "What proof have we that these people will do as they promise? I would rather have my freedom on the desert and what wealth I can gather by myself than to lie longer in the same camp with these Nasrâny pigs."

"There is no good in them," muttered another.

"I have looked upon their woman," said the Sheik, "and I find her good. I know a city where she would bring many pieces of gold."

"In the trunk of the chief Nasrâny there are many pieces of gold and silver," said one of the men. "His boy told that to a Galla, who repeated it to me."

"The plunder of the camp is rich beside," suggested a swarthy warrior.

"If we do this thing, perhaps the great cause will be lost," suggested the one who had first answered the Sheik.

"It is the cause of the Nasrâny," said Abu Batu, "and it is only for profit. Is not the huge pig always reminding us of the money and the women and the power that we shall have when we have thrown out the English? Man is moved only by his greed. Let us take our profits in advance and be gone."

Wamala was preparing the evening meal for his mistress. "Before, you were left with the brown Bwana," he said, "and he was no good; nor do I like any better the Sheik Abu Batu. He is no good. I wish that Bwana Colt was here."

"So do I," said Zora. "It seems to me that the Aarabs have been sullen and surly ever since the expedition returned from Opar."

"They have sat all day in the tent of their chief talking together," said Wamala; "and often Abu Batu looked at you."

"That is your imagination, Wamala," replied the girl. "He would not dare to harm me."

"Who would have thought that the brown Bwana would have dared to?" Wamala reminded her.

"Hush, Wamala—the first thing you know you will have me frightened," said Zora, and then suddenly: "Look, Wamala! Who is that?"

The black boy turned his eyes in the direction toward which his mistress was looking. At the edge of the camp stood a figure that might have rung an exclamation of surprise from a stoic. A beautiful woman stood there regarding them intently. She had halted just at the edge of camp—an almost naked woman whose gorgeous beauty was her first and most striking characteristic. Two golden discs covered her firm breasts and a narrow stomacher of gold and precious stones encircled her hips, supporting in front and behind a broad strip of soft leather, studded with gold and jewels, which formed the pattern of a pedestal on the summit of which was seated a grotesque bird. Her feet were shod in sandals that were covered with mud, as were her shapely legs upward to above her knees. A mass of wavy hair, shot with golden bronze lights by the rays of the setting sun, half surrounded an oval face, and from beneath narrow brows fearless gray eyes regarded them.

Some of the Aarabs had caught sight of her, too, and they were coming forward now toward her. She looked quickly from Zora and Wamala toward the others. Then the European girl arose quickly and approached her that she might reach her before the Aarabs did, and as she came near the stranger with outstretched hands, Zora smiled. La of Opar came quickly to meet her, as though sensing in the smile of the other an index to the friendly intent of this stranger.

"Who are you?" asked Zora. "And what are you doing here alone in the jungle?"

La shook her head and replied in a language that Zora did not understand.

Zora Drinov was an accomplished linguist but she exhausted every language in her repertoire, including a few phrases from various Bantu dialects, and still found no means of communicating with the stranger.

The Aarabs addressed her in their own tongue and Wamala in the dialect of his tribe, but all to no avail. Then Zora put an arm about her and led her toward her tent and there, by means of signs, La of Opar indicated that she desired to bathe. Wamala was directed to prepare a tub in Zora's tent and by the time supper was prepared the stranger reappeared, washed and refreshed.

As Zora Drinov seated herself opposite her strange guest, she was impressed with the belief that never before had she looked upon so beautiful a woman and she marveled that one who must have felt so utterly out of place in her surroundings should still retain a poise that suggested the majestic bearing of a queen rather than of a stranger ill at ease.

By signs and gestures, Zora sought to converse with her guest until even the regal La found herself laughing. Then La tried it too, until Zora knew that her guest had been threatened with clubs and knives and driven from her home, that she had walked a long way, that either a lion or a leopard had attacked her and that she was very tired.

When supper was over, Wamala prepared another cot for La in the tent with Zora, for something in the faces of the Aarabs had made the European girl fear for the safety of her beautiful guest.

"You must sleep outside the tent door tonight, Wamala," she said. "Here is an extra pistol."

In his goat-hair beyt Abu Batu, the Sheik, talked long into the night with the principal men of his tribe. "The new one," he said, "will bring a price such as has never been paid before!"

TARZAN awoke and glanced upward through the foliage at the stars. He saw that the night was half gone and he arose and stretched himself. He ate again sparingly of the flesh of Bara and slipped silently into the shadows of the night. . . .

The camp at the foot of the barrier cliff slept. A single askari kept guard and tended the beast-fire. From a tree at the edge of the camp two eyes watched him, and when he was looking away a figure dropped silently into the shadows. Behind the huts of the porters it crept, pausing occasionally to test the air with dilated nostrils. It came at last, among the shadows, to the tents of the Europeans and one by one it ripped a hole in each rear wall and stealthily entered.

It was Tarzan searching for La, but he did not find her and, disappointed, he turned to another matter.

Making a half circuit of the camp, moving sometimes only inch by inch as he wormed himself along on his belly, lest the askari upon guard might see him, he made his way to the shelters of the other askaris and there he selected a bow and arrow and a stout spear. But even yet he was not done.

For a long time he crouched waiting—waiting until the askari by the fire should turn in a certain direction.

Presently the sentry arose and threw some dry wood upon the fire, after which he walked toward the shelter of his fellows to awaken the man who was to relieve him. It was this moment for which Tarzan had been waiting. The path of the askari brought him close to where Tarzan lay in hiding. The man approached and passed and in the same instant Tarzan leaped to his feet and sprang upon the unsuspecting black. A strong arm encircled the fellow from behind and swung him to a broad, bronzed shoulder. As Tarzan had anticipated a scream of terror burst from the man's lips, awakening his fellows, and then he was borne swiftly through the shadows of the camp away from the beast-fire as, with his prey struggling futilely in his grasp, the ape-man leaped the thorn *boma* and disappeared into the black jungle beyond.

So sudden and violent the attack, so complete the man's surprise, that he had loosened his grasp upon his rifle in an effort to clutch his antagonist as he was thrown lightly to the shoulder of his captor.

His screams, echoing through the forest, brought his terrified companions from their shelters in time to see an indistinct form leap the *boma* and vanish into the darkness. They stood temporarily paralyzed by fright, listening to the diminishing cries of their comrade. Presently these ceased suddenly. Then the headman found his voice.

"Simba!" he said.

"It was not Simba," said another. "It ran high upon two legs, like a man. I saw it."

PRESENTLY from the dark jungle came a hideous, long-drawn cry. "That is the voice of neither man nor lion," said the headman.

"It is a demon," said another, and then they huddled about the fire, throwing dry wood upon it until its blaze had crackled high into the air.

In the darkness of the jungle Tarzan paused and laid aside his spear and bow, possession of which had permitted him to use but one hand in his abduction of the sentry. Now the fingers of his free hand closed upon the throat of his victim, putting a sudden period to his screams. Only for an instant did Tarzan choke the man and when he relaxed his grasp upon the fellow's throat, the black made no further outcry, fearing to invite again the ungentle grip of those steel fingers. Quickly Tarzan jerked the fellow to his feet, relieved him of his knife and, grasping him by his thick wool, pushed him ahead of him into the jungle, after stooping to retrieve his spear and bow. It was then that he voiced the victory cry of the bull-ape, for the value of the effect that it would have not only upon his victim, but upon his fellows in the camp behind him.

Tarzan had no intention of harming the fellow. His quarrel was not with the innocent black tools of the white men and, while he would not have hesitated to take the life of the black had it been necessary, he knew well enough that he might effect his purpose with them as well without bloodshed as with it.

The whites could not accomplish anything without their black allies and if Tarzan could successfully undermine the morale of the latter, the scheme of their masters would be as effectually thwarted as though he had destroyed them, since he was confident that they would not remain in a district where they were constantly reminded of the presence of a malign, supernatural enemy. Furthermore, this policy accorded better with Tarzan's grim sense of humor, and therefore amused him, which the taking of life never did.

For an hour he marched his victim ahead of him in an utter silence, which he knew would have its effect upon the nerves of the black man.

Finally he halted him, stripped his remaining clothing from him, and taking the fellow's loin-cloth bound his wrists and ankles together loosely. Then Tarzan left his captive, taking his cartridge-belt and other belongings with him, knowing the man would soon free himself from his bonds and believing that he had made his escape, would remain for life convinced that he had narrowly eluded a terrible fate.

Satisfied with his night's work, Tarzan returned to the tree in which he had cached the carcass of Bara, ate once more and lay up in sleep until morning, when he again took up his search for La, seeking trace of her up the valley beyond the barrier cliff of Opar, in the general direction her spoor had indicated she had gone, though, in fact, she had gone in precisely the opposite direction, down the valley.

CHAPTER IX

THE TREACHERY OF ABU BATU

NIGHT was falling when a frightened little monkey took refuge in a tree-top. For days he had been wandering through the jungle, seeking in his little mind a solution for his problem during those occasional intervals that he could concentrate his mental forces upon it. But in an instant he might forget it to go swinging and scampering through the trees; or again a sudden terror would drive it from his consciousness, as one or another of the hereditary menaces to his existence appeared within the range of his perceptive faculties.

While his grief lasted it was real and poignant, and tears welled in the eyes of little Nkima as he thought of his absent master. Lurking always within him upon the borderland of conviction was the thought that he must obtain succor for Tarzan. In some way he must fetch aid to his master. The great black Gomangani warriors, who were also the servants of Tarzan, were many dark-nesses away, but yet it was in the general direction of the country of the Waziri that he drifted. Time was in no sense of the essence of the solution of this or any other problem in the mind of Nkima. He had seen Tarzan enter Opar alive. He had not seen him destroyed, nor had he seen him come out of the city; therefore by the standards of his logic Tarzan must still be alive and in the city, but because the city was filled with enemies Tarzan must be in danger. As conditions were they would remain. Nkima could not readily visualize any change that he did not actually witness, so, whether he found and fetched the Waziri to-day or tomorrow would have little effect upon the result. They would go to Opar and kill Tarzan's enemies, and then

little Nkima would have his master once more and he would not have to be afraid of Sheeta, or Sabor, or Histah.

Night fell and in the forest Nkima heard a gentle tapping. He aroused himself and listened intently. The tapping grew in volume until it rolled and moved through the jungle. Its source was at no great distance and as Nkima became aware of this, his excitement grew.

The moon was well up in the heavens, but the shadows of the jungle were dense and Nkima was upon the horns of a dilemma, between his desire to go to the place from which the drumming emanated and his fear of the dangers that might lie along the way. But at length the urge prevailed over his terror and keeping well up in the relatively greater safety of the tree-tops he swung quickly in the direction from which the sound was coming, to halt at last above a little natural clearing that was roughly circular in shape.

Below him in the moonlight he witnessed a scene that he had spied upon before, for here the great apes of To-yat were engaged in the death-dance of the Dum-Dum. In the center of the amphitheater, was one of those remarkable earthen drums, which from time immemorial primitive man has heard, but which few have seen. Before the drum were seated two old shes, who beat upon its resounding surface with short sticks. There was a rough rhythmic cadence to their beating and to it, in a savage circle, danced the bulls, while encircling them in a thin outer line the females and the young squatted upon their haunches, enthralled spectators of the savage scene.

Close beside the drum lay the dead body of Sheeta the leopard, to celebrate whose killing the Dum-Dum had been organized.

Presently the dancing bulls would rush in upon the body and beat it with heavy sticks and, leaping out again, resume their dance. When the hunt, and the attack and the death had been depicted at length, they would cast away their bludgeons and with bared fangs leap upon the carcass,



"Look, Wamala," said Zora. "Who is that?" At the edge of camp a beautiful woman stood regarding them intently.

tearing and rending it as they fought among themselves for large pieces or choice morsels.

Now Nkima and his kind are noted neither for their tact nor judgment. One wiser than little Nkima would have remained silent until the dance and the feast were over, until a new day had come and the great bulls of the tribe of To-yat had recovered from the hysterical frenzy that the drum and the dancing always induced within them.

But little Nkima was only a monkey. What he wanted, he wanted immediately, not being endowed with that mental poise which results in patience, and so he swung by his tail from an overhanging branch and scolded at the top of his voice in an effort to attract the attention of the great apes below.

"To-yat! Ga-yat! Zutho!" he cried. "Tarzan is in danger! Come with Nkima and save Tarzan!"

A great bull stopped in the midst of the dancing and looked up. "Go away, Manu," he growled. "Go away or we kill!" But little Nkima thought that they could not catch him and so he continued to swing from the branch and yell and scream at them until finally To-yat sent a young ape, who was not too heavy, to clamber into the upper branches of the tree, to catch little Nkima and kill him.

Here was an emergency which Nkima had not foreseen. Like many people, he had believed that every one would be interested in what interested him, and when he had first heard the booming of the drums of the Dum-Dum he thought that the moment the apes learned of Tarzan's peril they would set out upon the trail to Opar.

Now, however, he knew differently and as the real menace of his mistake became painfully apparent with the leaping of a young ape into the tree below him, little Nkima emitted a loud shriek of terror and fled through the night; nor did he pause until, panting and exhausted, he had put a good mile between himself and the tribe of To-yat.

WHEN La of Opar awoke in the tent of Zora Drinov she looked about her, taking in the unfamiliar objects that surrounded her. Presently her gaze rested upon the face of her sleeping hostess.

These, indeed, she thought, must be the people of Tarzan, for had they not treated her with kindness and courtesy? They had offered her no harm and had fed her and given her shelter. A new thought crossed her mind now and her brows contracted, as did the pupils of her eyes into which there came a sudden, savage light. Perhaps this woman was Tarzan's mate! La of Opar grasped the hilt of Darus' knife where it lay ready beside her.

But then, as suddenly as it had come, the mood passed, for in her heart she knew that she could not return evil for good, nor could she harm one whom Tarzan loved; and so when Zora opened her eyes La greeted her with a smile.

If the European girl was a cause for astonishment to La, she herself filled the other with profoundest wonder and mystification. Her scant, yet rich and gorgeous apparel harked back to an ancient age and the gleaming whiteness of her skin seemed as much out of place in the heart of an African jungle as did her trappings in the twentieth century. Here was a mystery that nothing in the past experience of Zora Drinov could assist in solving. How she wished that they could converse, but all she could do was to smile back at the beautiful creature regarding her so intently.

La, accustomed as she had been to being waited upon all her life by the lesser priestesses of Opar, was surprised by the facility with which Zora Drinov attended to her own needs as she rose to bathe and dress, the only service she received being in the form of a pail of hot water which Wamala fetched and poured into her folding tub. Yet

though La had never before been expected to lift a hand in the making of her toilet, she was far from helpless, and perhaps she found pleasure in the new experience of doing for herself.

Unlike the customs of the men of Opar, those of its women required scrupulous bodily cleanliness and in the past much of La's time had been devoted to her toilet, to the care of her nails and her teeth and her hair and to the massaging of her body with aromatic unguents—customs handed down from a cultured civilization of antiquity, to take on in ruined Opar the significance of religious rites.

By the time the two girls were ready for breakfast, Wamala was prepared to serve it. As they sat outside the tent beneath the shade of a tree, eating the coarse fare of the camp, Zora noted unwonted activity about the byût of the Aarabs, but she gave the matter little thought as they had upon other occasions moved their tents from one part of the camp to another.

Breakfast over, Zora took down her rifle, wiped out the bore and oiled the breech-mechanism, for today she was going out after fresh meat, the Aarabs having refused to hunt. La watched her with evident interest and later saw her depart with Wamala and two of the black porters, but she did not attempt to accompany her, since she had received no sign to do so.

Ibn Dammuk was the son of a sheik of the same tribe as Abu Batu and upon this expedition he was the latter's right-hand man. With the fold of his thôb drawn across the lower part of his face, leaving only his eyes exposed, he had been watching the two girls from a distance. He saw Zora Drinov quit the camp with a gun-bearer and two porters and knew that she had gone to hunt.

For some time after she had departed he sat in silence with two companions. Then he arose and sauntered across the camp toward La of Opar, where she sat buried in reverie in a camp chair before Zora's tent. As the three men approached La eyed them with level gaze, her natural suspicion of strangers aroused in her breast. As they came closer and their features became distinct, she felt a sudden distrust of them. They were crafty, malign-looking men—not at all like Tarzan—and instinctively she distrusted them.

They halted before her and Ibn Dammuk, the son of a sheik, addressed her.

La eyed him haughtily. She did not understand him and she did not wish to, for the message that she read in his eyes disgusted her. She shook her head to indicate that she did not understand and turned away to indicate that the interview was terminated. Ibn Dammuk stepped closer and laid a hand familiarly upon her naked shoulder.

Her eyes flaming with anger, La leaped to her feet, one hand moving swiftly to the hilt of her dagger. Ibn Dammuk stepped back, but one of his men attempted to seize her. Misguided fool! Like a tigress La was upon him, and before his friends could intervene the sharp blade of the knife of Darus, the priest of the Flaming God, had sunk thrice into his breast—and with a gasping scream he had slumped to the ground dead.

With flaming eyes and bloody knife, the high priestess of Opar stood above her kill, while Abu Batu and the other Aarabs, attracted by the death-cry of the stricken man, ran hurriedly toward the little group.

"Stand back!" cried La. "Lay no profaning hand upon the person of the high priestess of the Flaming God!"

They did not understand her words, but they understood her flashing eyes and her dripping blade. Jabbering volubly, they gathered around her, but at a safe distance.

"What means this, Ibn Dammuk?" demanded Abu Batu.

"Dogman did but touch her and she flew at him like *el adrea*. lord of the broad head."



"Stand back!" cried La. "Lay no profaning hand upon the person of the high priestess of the Flaming God!"

"A lioness she may be," said Abu Batu, "but she must not be harmed."

"Wullah!" exclaimed Ibn Dammuk. "But she must be tamed."

"Her taming we may leave to him who will pay many pieces of gold for her," replied the Sheik. "It is necessary only for us to cage her. Surround her, my children, and take the knife from her. Make her wrists secure behind her back, and by the time the other returns we shall have struck camp and be ready to depart."

A dozen brawny men leaped upon La simultaneously. "Do not harm her! Do not harm her!" screamed Abu Batu, as, fighting like a lioness indeed, La sought to defend herself. Slashing right and left with her dagger, she drew blood more than once before they overpowered her, nor did they accomplish it before another Arab fell with a pierced heart; but at length they succeeded in wrenching the blade from her and securing her wrists.

Leaving two warriors to guard her, Abu Batu turned his attention to gathering up the few black servants that remained in camp. These he forced to prepare loads of such of the camp equipment and provisions as he required, and while this work was going on under Ibn Dammuk's supervision, the Sheik ransacked the tents of the Europeans, giving special attention to those of Zora Drinov and Zveri, where he expected to find the gold that the leader of the expedition was reputed to have in large quantities; nor was he entirely disappointed since he found in Zora's tent a box containing a considerable amount of money, though by no means the great quantity that he had expected, a fact which was due to the foresight of Zveri, who had personally buried the bulk of his funds beneath the floor of his tent. . . .

Zora met with unexpected success in her hunting, for within a little more than an hour of her departure from camp she had come upon antelope, and two quick shots had dropped as many members of the herd. She waited while the porters skinned and dressed them, and then returned leisurely toward camp. Her mind was occupied to some

extent with the disquieting attitude of the Arabs, but she was not at all prepared for the reception that she met when she approached the camp about noon.

She was walking in advance, immediately followed by Wamala, who was carrying both of her rifles, while behind them were the porters, staggering under their heavy loads, when, just as she was about to enter the clearing, Arabs leaped from the underbrush on either side of the trail. Two of them seized Wamala and wrenched the rifles from his grasp, while others laid heavy hands upon Zora. She tried to free herself from them and draw her revolver, but the attack had taken her so by surprise that before she could accomplish anything in defense, she was

overpowered, her hands drawn behind her and bound at her back.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded. "Where is Abu Batu, the Sheik?"

The men laughed at her. "You shall see him presently," said one. "He has another guest whom he is entertaining, so he could not come to meet you,"—at which they all laughed again.

As she stepped into the clearing where she could obtain an unobstructed view of the camp, she was astounded by what she saw. Every tent had been struck. The Arabs were leaning on their rifles ready to march, each of them burdened with a small pack, while the few black men who had been left in camp, were lined up before heavy loads. All the balance of the paraphernalia of the camp, which Abu Batu had not men enough to transport, was heaped in a pile in the center of the clearing, and even as she looked she saw men setting torches to it.

As she was led across the clearing toward the waiting Arabs, she saw her erstwhile guest between two warriors, with wrists confined by thongs even as Zora's own. Near her, scowling malevolently, was Abu Batu.

"Why have you done this thing, Abu Batu?" demanded Zora.

"Allah was wroth that we should betray our land to the Nasrâny," said the Sheik. "We have seen the light and we are going back to our own people."

"What do you intend to do with this woman and with me?" asked Zora.

"We shall take you with us for a little way," replied Abu Batu. "I know a kind man who is very rich, who will give you both a good home."

"You mean that you are going to sell us to some black sultan?" demanded the girl.

The Sheik shrugged. "I would not put it that way," he said. "Rather let us say that I am making a present to a great and good friend and saving you and this other woman from certain death in the jungle should we depart without you."

"Abu Batu, you are a hypocrite and a traitor," said Zora, her voice vibrant with contempt.

"The Nasrâny like to call names," said the Sheik with a sneer. "Perhaps if the pig Zveri had not called us names this would not have happened."

"So this is your revenge," asked Zora, "because he reproached you for your cowardice at Opar?"

"Enough!" snapped Abu Batu. "Come, my children, let us be gone."

As the flames licked at the edges of the great pile of provisions and equipment that the Aarabs were forced to leave behind, the deserters started upon their march westward.

The girls marched near the head of the column, the feet of the Aarabs and the carriers behind them totally obliterating their spoor from the motley record of the trail. They might have found some comfort in their straits had they been able to converse with one another, but La could understand no one and Zora found no pleasure in speaking to the Aarabs, while Wamala and the other blacks were so far toward the rear of the column that she could not have communicated with them.

To pass the time away, Zora conceived the idea of teaching her companion in misery some European language and because in the original party there had been more who were familiar with English than with any other tongue, she selected that language for her experiment.

She began by pointing to herself and saying "woman" and then to La and repeating the same word; after which she pointed to several of the Aarabs in succession and said "man" in each instance.

It was evident that La understood her purpose immediately, for she entered into the spirit of it with eagerness and alacrity, repeating the two words again and again, each time indicating either a man or a woman.

Next the European girl again pointed to herself and said "Zora." For a moment La was perplexed; then she smiled and nodded.

"Zora," she said, pointing to her companion and then, swiftly, she touched her own breast with a slender forefinger and said, "La."

And this was the beginning. Each hour La learned new words, all nouns at first, that described each familiar object that appeared oftenest to their view. She learned with remarkable celerity, evidencing an alert and intelligent mind and a retentive memory.

Her pronunciation was not always perfect for she had a decidedly foreign accent that was like nothing Zora Drinov ever had heard before, and so altogether captivating that the teacher never tired of hearing her pupil recite.

As the march progressed Zora realized that there was

little likelihood that they would be mistreated by their captors, it being evident to her that the Sheik was impressed with the belief that the better the condition in which they could be presented to their prospective purchaser the more handsome the return that Abu Batu might hope to receive.

Their route lay to the northwest through a section of the Galla country of Abyssinia and from scraps of conversation Zora overheard she learned that Abu Batu and his followers were apprehensive of danger during this portion of the journey.

And well they may have been apprehensive since for ages the Aarabs have conducted raids in Galla territory for the purpose of capturing slaves, and among the negroes with them was a Galla slave that Abu Batu had brought with him from his desert home.

After the first day the prisoners had been allowed the freedom of their hands, but always Aarab guards surrounded them, though there seemed little likelihood that an unarmed girl would take the risk of escaping into the jungle where she would be surrounded by the dangers of wild beasts or almost certain starvation.

However, could Abu Batu have read their thoughts he might have been astonished to learn that in the mind of each was a determination to escape to any fate rather than to march docilely on to an end that the European girl was fully conscious of and which La of Opar unquestionably surmised in part.

La's education was progressing nicely by the time the party neared the border of the Galla country; but in the meantime both girls had



With his prey struggling futilely in his grasp, the ape-man disappeared into the jungle.

become aware of a new menace threatening La.

Ibn Dammuk marched often beside her and in his eyes, when he looked at her, was a message that needed no words to convey. But when Abu Batu was near, Ibn Dammuk ignored the fair prisoner and this caused Zora the most apprehension, for it convinced her that the wily Ibn was but biding his time until he might find conditions favorable to the carrying out of some scheme that he already had decided upon. Nor did Zora harbor any doubts as to the general purpose of his plan.

At the edge of the Galla country they were halted by a river in flood. They could not go north into Abyssinia proper and they dared not go south where they might naturally have expected pursuit to follow. So perforce they were compelled to wait impatiently, where they were.

And while they waited Ibn Dammuk struck.

CHAPTER X

IN THE DEATH-CELL OF OPAR

ONCE again Peter Zveri stood before the walls of Opar and once again the courage of his black soldiers was dissipated by the weird cries of the inmates of the city of mystery. The ten warriors, who had not been to Opar before and who had volunteered to enter the city, halted, trembling, as the first of the blood-curdling screams rose, shrill and piercing, from the forbidding ruins.

Miguel Romero once more led the invaders and directly behind him was Wayne Colt. According to the plan the blacks were to have followed closely behind these two, with the balance of the whites bringing up the rear where they might rally and encourage the negroes, or if necessary, force them on at the points of their pistols. But the blacks would not even enter the opening of the outer wall, so demoralized were they by the uncanny warning screams which their superstitious minds attributed to malignant demons against which there could be no defense and whose animosity meant almost certain death for those who disregarded their wishes.

"In with you, you dirty cowards!" cried Zveri, menacing the blacks with his revolver.

One of the warriors raised his rifle threateningly. "Put away your weapon, white man," he said. "We will fight men, but we will not fight the spirits of the dead."

"Lay off, Peter," said Dorsky. "You will have the whole bunch on us in a minute and we shall all be killed. Every black in the outfit is in sympathy with these men."

Zveri lowered his pistol and commenced to plead with the warriors, promising them rewards that amounted to riches to them if they would accompany the whites into the city. But the volunteers were obdurate—nothing could induce them to venture into Opar.

Seeing failure once again imminent and with a mind already obsessed by the belief that the treasures of Opar would make him fabulously wealthy and insure the success of his secret scheme of empire, Zveri determined to follow Romero and Colt with the balance of his aides, which consisted only of Dorsky, Ivitch and the Filipino boy.

"Come on," he said, "we will have to make a try at it alone, if these yellow dogs won't help us."

By the time the four men had passed through the outer wall, Romero and Colt were already out of sight beyond the inner wall. Once again the warning scream broke menacingly upon the brooding silence of the ruined city.

"God!" ejaculated Ivitch. "What do you suppose it could be?"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Zveri irritably. "Stop thinking about it, or you'll go yellow like those damn' blacks."

SLOWLY they crossed the court toward the inner wall, nor was there much enthusiasm manifest among them other than for an evident desire in the breast of each to permit one of the others the glory of leading the advance. Tony had reached the opening when a bedlam of noise from the opposite side of the wall burst upon their ears—a hideous chorus of war-cries, mingled with the sound of rushing feet. There was a shot, and then another and another.

Tony turned to see if his companions were following him. They had halted and were listening with blanched faces.

Then Ivitch turned. "To hell with the gold!" he said, and started back toward the outer wall at a run.

"Come back, you lousy cur!" cried Zveri, and took after him with Dorsky at his heels. Tony hesitated for a moment and then scurried in pursuit, nor did any of them halt until they were beyond the outer wall. There Zveri overtook Ivitch and seized him by the shoulder.

"I ought to kill you!" he cried in a trembling voice.

"You were as glad to get out of there as I was," growled Ivitch. "What was the sense of going in there? We would only have been killed like Colt and Romero. There were too many of them. Didn't you hear them?"

"I think Ivitch is right," said Dorsky. "It's all right to be brave, but we have got to remember the cause—if we are killed everything is lost."

"But the gold!" exclaimed Zveri. "Think of the gold!"

"Gold is no good to dead men," Dorsky reminded him curtly.

"How about our comrades?" asked Tony. "Are we to leave them to be killed?"

"To hell with the Mexican," said Zveri; "and as for the American I think his funds will still be available as long as we can keep the news of his death from getting back to the Coast."

"You are not even going to try to rescue them?" asked Tony.

"I cannot do it alone," said Zveri.

"I will go with you," said Tony.

"Little good two of us can accomplish," mumbled Zveri. Then, in one of his sudden rages, he advanced menacingly upon the Filipino.

"Who do you think you are, anyway?" he demanded. "I am in command here—remember that! When I want your advice I'll ask for it!"

WHEN Romero and Colt had passed through the inner wall, that part of the temple interior which they could see appeared deserted and yet they were conscious of movement in the darker recesses and the apertures of the ruined galleries that looked down into the courtyard.

Colt glanced back. "Shall we wait for the others?" he asked.

Romero shrugged. "I think we are going to have this glory all to ourselves, comrade," he said with a grin.

Colt smiled back at him. "Then let's get on with the business," he said. "I don't see anything very terrifying yet."

"There was something in there though," said Romero. "I've seen things moving."

"So have I," said Colt.

With their rifles ready, they advanced boldly into the temple; but they had not gone far when, from shadowy archways and from numerous gloomy doorways there rushed a horde of horrid men and the silence of the ancient city was shattered by hideous war-cries.

Colt was in advance and now he kept on moving forward, firing a shot above the heads of the grotesque warrior priests of Opar. Romero saw a number of the enemy running along the side of the great room which they had entered, with the evident intention of cutting off their retreat. He swung about and fired, but not over their heads. Realizing the gravity of their position, he shot to kill, and now Colt did the same, with the result that the screams of a couple of wounded men mingled now with the war-cries of their fellows.

Romero was forced to drop back a few steps to prevent the Oparians from surrounding him. He shot rapidly now and succeeded in checking the advance around their flank. A quick glance at Colt showed him standing his ground and at the same instant he saw a hurled club strike the American on the head. The man dropped like a log and instantly his body was covered by the terrible little men of Opar.

Miguel Romero realized that his companion was lost and even if not now already dead, he could accomplish nothing single-handed, toward Colt's rescue. Indeed, if he escaped with his own life he would be fortunate; and

so, keeping up a steady fire, he fell back toward the aperture in the inner wall.

Having captured one of the invaders, seeing the other falling back and hesitant to further risk the devastating fire of the terrifying weapon in the hand of their single antagonist, the Oparians hesitated.

Meanwhile Romero passed through the inner wall, turned and ran swiftly to the outer and a moment later had joined his companions upon the plain.

"Where is Colt?" demanded Zveri.

"They knocked him out with a club and captured him," said Romero. "He is probably dead by this time."

"And you deserted him?" asked Zveri.

The Mexican turned upon his chief in fury. "You ask me that?" he demanded. "You turned pale and ran even before you saw the enemy! If you fellows had backed us up, Colt might not have been lost—but to let us go in there alone— The two of us didn't have a Chinaman's chance with that bunch of wild men. And you accuse me of cowardice?"

"I didn't do anything of the kind," said Zveri sullenly. "I never said you were a coward."

"You meant to imply it, though," snapped Romero; "but let me tell you, Zveri, that you can't get away with that with me or anyone else who has been to Opar with you."

From beyond the walls rose a savage cry of victory and while it still rumbled through the tarnished halls of Opar, Zveri turned dejectedly away from the city.

"It's no use," he said. "I can't capture Opar alone. We are returning to camp."

THE little priests, swarming over Colt, stripped him of his weapons and secured his hands behind his back. He was still unconscious and so they lifted him to the shoulder of one of their fellows and bore him away into the interior of the temple.

When Colt regained consciousness he found himself lying on the floor of a large chamber. It was the throne-room of the temple of Opar, where he had been fetched that Oah the high priestess might see the prisoner.

Perceiving that their captive had regained consciousness his guards jerked him roughly to his feet and pushed him forward toward the foot of the dais upon which stood Oah's throne.

The effect of the picture bursting suddenly upon him imparted to Colt the definite impression that he was the victim of an hallucination or a dream. The outer chamber of the ruin, in which he had fallen, had given no suggestion of the size and magnificence of this great chamber, the grandeur of which was scarcely dimmed by the ruin of ages.

He saw before him, upon an ornate throne, a young woman of exceptional physical beauty, surrounded by the semi-barbaric grandeur of an ancient civilization. Grotesque, hairy men and beautiful maidens formed her entourage. Her eyes, resting upon him, were cold and cruel—her mien haughty and contemptuous. A squat warrior, more ape-like in his conformation than human, was addressing her in a language unfamiliar to the American.

When he had finished, the girl rose from the throne and drawing a long knife from her girdle raised it high above her head as she spoke rapidly and almost fiercely, her eyes fixed upon the prisoner.

From among a group of priestesses at the right of Oah's throne, a girl, just come into womanhood, regarded the prisoner through half-closed eyes and beneath the golden plates that confined her smooth white breasts, the heart

of Nao palpitated to the thoughts that contemplation of this strange warrior engendered within her.

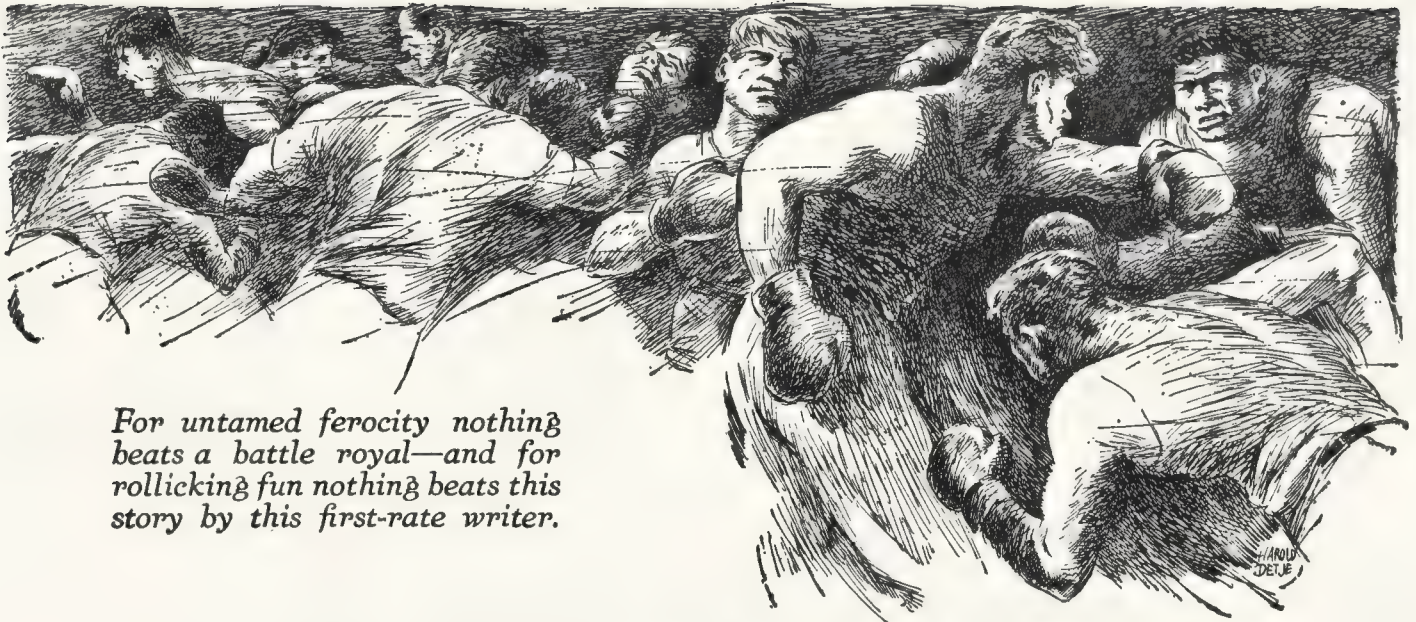
When Oah had finished speaking, Colt was led away, quite ignorant of the fact that he had been listening to the sentence of death imposed upon him by the high priestess of the Flaming God. His guards conducted him to a cell just within the entrance of a tunnel leading from the sacrificial court to the pits beneath the city and because it was not entirely below ground, fresh air and light had access to it through a window and the grated bars of its doorway. Here the escort left him, after removing the bonds from his wrists.

Through the small window in his cell Wayne Colt looked out upon the inner court of the Temple of the Sun of Opar. He saw the surrounding galleries rising tier upon tier to the summit of a lofty wall. He saw the stone altar standing in the center of the court, and the brown stains upon it and upon the pavement at its foot told him what the unintelligible words of Oah had been unable to convey. For an instant he felt his heart sink within his breast and a shudder passed through his frame as he contemplated the inescapability of the fate which confronted him. There could be no mistaking the purpose of that altar when viewed in connection with the grinning skulls of former human sacrifices which stared through eyeless sockets upon him from their niches in the surrounding walls.

Fascinated by the horror of his situation, he stood staring at the altar and skulls. Presently he gained control of himself and shook the terror from him, yet the hopelessness of his situation continued to depress him. His thoughts turned to his companion. He wondered what Romero's fate had been. There, indeed, had been a brave and gallant comrade; in fact, the only member of the party who had impressed Colt favorably, or in whose society he had found pleasure. The others had seemed either ignorant fanatics or avaricious opportunists; but the manner and speech of the Mexican had stamped him as a light-hearted soldier of fortune, who might gayly offer his life in any cause which momentarily seized his fancy with an eye more singly for excitement and adventure than for any serious purpose. He did not know, of course, that Zveri and the others had deserted him, but he was confident that Romero had not before his cause had become utterly hopeless, or until the Mexican himself had been killed or captured.

IN lonely contemplation of his predicament, Colt spent the balance of the long afternoon. Darkness fell and still there came no sign from his captors. He wondered if they intended leaving him there without food or water, or if, perchance, the ceremony that was to see him offered in sacrifice upon that grim, brown-stained altar was scheduled to commence so soon that they felt it unnecessary to minister to his physical needs.

He had lain down upon the hard cement-like surface of the cell floor and was trying to find momentary relief in sleep when his attention was attracted by the shadow of a sound coming from the courtyard where the altar stood. As he listened he was positive that some one was approaching and rising quietly he went to the window and looked out. In the shadowy darkness of the night, relieved only by the faint light of distant stars, he saw something moving across the courtyard toward his cell, but whether man or beast he could not distinguish—and then, from somewhere high up among the lofty ruins, there pealed out upon the silent night the long-drawn scream, which seemed now to the American as much a part of the mysterious city of Opar as the crumbling ruins themselves.



For untamed ferocity nothing beats a battle royal—and for rollicking fun nothing beats this story by this first-rate writer.

Fast and Clever

By GEORGE F. WORTS

PADDY MALONE swung about from the window in his swivel-chair with the ease and grace of a ball revolving on a seal's nose. He broke off a two-inch ash from his forty-five-cent cigar into the sawed-off base of the .75 mm. shell which Ruby Barry, the light heavy, had brought him as a holy souvenir of the war. He carefully moved from the front to the rear of his tidy oak desk a pair of four-ounce gloves, caked with sweat, blood and resin and tagged, *"To Paddy with complements of Kid Vogle, flyweight champ. You taught me what adress to rite on the left."* He placed his plump hands behind his neck, so that the three-carat diamond he had won in a crap game seventeen years ago was uppermost. Then, tilting back, he stared up at the embarrassed youth who stood just under the autographed photograph of Jim Jeffries.

Marty Britt returned the shrewd, squinting stare with glowing-eyed hopefulness. He was a tall, nice-looking youngster with a button of a nose, a pair of prominent ears as red as Oriental poppies, and an air of boyish determination. He had splendid shoulders. His hands were as large and brown as the paws of a cinnamon bear.

"Britt, I know your record," said Paddy Malone. "I know you have a good right and a pretty good left. But the point is, are you slower than a box car, or are you fast and clever?"

"Listen, Mr. Malone," the boy began, "I knocked out—"

"Knockouts don't mean a thing. Any boy who gets in the way of the pile-driver you carry on the end of that right arm is going to hear bird music."

"I—I can swap 'em, too, Mr. Malone!"

"And when you put all that together, what does it spell?" cried Paddy Malone. "Not a thing! You have got a punch and you can take it. But does that mean that you are fast or does it mean that you are clever?"

"If you'll just give me a break, Mr. Malone!"

"I need a fast, clever heavyweight. If I can find a good willing boy who has those things born in him, I'll give him plenty of breaks. I'll train him. I'll make a fortune for him. Between you and me, I am looking for another Dempsey. Are you him, or are you just another palooka?"

I like your record. I like your looks. But the only way I can tell is to give you the psychological test."

Marty Britt was dismayed. "Gee, Mr. Malone, I aint educated. I don't know any psychology."

"You don't have to know any psychology," said Paddy. "If you are fast and clever, I will know. If you are slow and dumb like all the heavies I have looked over in the past year, I will know."

"What do I have to do, Mr. Malone?"

"Go into a battle royal."

A hurt look came into the boy's steady, clear blue eyes. To a fighter who has graduated from the pork-and-bean class, participating in a battle royal is comparable to a grand opera prima donna entering the chorus of a burlesque show. A battle royal is for bums, not star-bout boys.

"But what can a battle royal show you, Mr. Malone?"

"That's where the psychology comes in. It's a pretty crude test, but it shows me just what I want to see. Will you or won't you?"

The boy hesitated.

"The chances are all against you," said Paddy.

"I'll do it," said Marty Britt.

It was the kind of athletic club in which a dozen impromptu bouts are apt to take place in the audience while an evening's card is being run off. The room was packed and thick with tobacco-smoke when Paddy and Marty Britt went in. From the center light above the ring a red silk ribbon hung down. At the end of the ribbon, about nine feet from the canvas, dangled, a rabbit's foot.

Paddy and the boy went down an aisle to the ring. One corner was full of men. They were a seedy, unshaven lot of all ages and sizes. They wore undershirts, pants, shoes and six-ounce gloves. Most of them looked scared.

"Take off your coat and shirt and climb in there," said Paddy.

The boy obeyed. Across from him, standing alone, was a gorilla of a man with mean eyes and hairy arms and a low forehead. And Marty wondered if he was also taking the psychological test. The gorilla looked at Marty and grinned. It was the most evil grin Marty had ever seen.

An announcer shouted: "Now, you guys, listen! The rabbit's-foot battle royal is a little different from the ordinary battle royal, see? This is a new invention of that great little manager and trainer of champions, Paddy Malone, who we have with us again tonight. At the bell, you guys start fightin'. The guy who gets that rabbit's foot and keeps it wins the fight and a purse of twenty-five dollars in gold. If you're knocked down, get up and fight as many times as you want. Now spread out along the ropes and get ready for the bell. And give us a fight!"

The crowd was beginning to laugh; it is funny even to think of ten men in one ring all fighting one another.

When the bell rang, the ten contestants came cautiously out from the ropes, some grinning sheepishly, some looking grim and desperate, others looking scared—all but Marty and the big gorilla. They singled each other out and rushed. They exchanged a volley of punches, but before anything decisive happened, and just as Marty was saying to himself, "I'll show him I'm fast and I'll show him I'm clever!" a glove from behind clipped him on the side of the head, and the gorilla man was simultaneously engaged by two other men.

The crowd was roaring with laughter. Marty sunk his right into a solar plexus and snapped up his left to a jaw, and two men went down. In as little time, he dropped a third and a fourth. As he turned to engage another foe who had jabbed him in the side, he saw the gorilla man strike well below the belt one man who looked forty-five years old, then kick another in the shins. A fist thumped on the back of Marty's neck and he spun about to hook a right to the chin of the grinning youth who had delivered it.

What happened next was so confusing that Marty did not understand it for several seconds. He sprawled face-forward to the canvas. His left leg at the knee had suddenly suffered a sharp pang, and at the same time a glove came rocking out of nowhere and struck him in the back of the head. He had been kicked and then knocked almost senseless by the gorilla.

All about him on the canvas were men. Some were crawling out of the ring. Some were unconscious. Marty shook his head. He met, not ten feet away, the twinkling gray Irish eyes of Paddy Malone.

Marty thought: "I guess I am slow and dumb. I don't see where any psychology comes in."

He started to rise. Then a stratagem took form in his head, and he lay still and watched and waited.

There were still three men on their feet, the gorilla and two heavy sluggers. They were engaged in a three-cornered fight and the crowd was shouting with laughter. Marty saw the gorilla drop a left very low, and one of the sluggers wilted to the canvas. The gorilla seized the other man by the shoulders, spun him about twice, and sent two terrific punches, a left and a right, to his jaw. The man dropped directly under the rabbit's foot.

As the gorilla stepped upon his prostrate body and reached up for the rabbit's foot, Marty executed his stratagem. He sprang up from the canvas. Two wet black gloves were about to clutch the rabbit's foot. Marty swung. Every ounce of strength he possessed he put behind that punch. It started at his heels, rippled up his leg- and back-muscles to his shoulders, and down his arm to the wrist. It landed squarely in the gorilla's solar plexus.

With a gasp, the gorilla dropped upon the last man he had floored. Marty climbed upon him, reached up with both gloves and plucked the rabbit's foot. All about the room men were thumping one another on the back and strangling with laughter. Then Malone was in the ring.

"That was right," he was saying. "You did it just right, Marty! You know all the psychology you need to know. You're fast and you're clever too!"

Baptist Hill's Dog Derby

An outsmarted colored business-gentleman is funny; a ginned-up racing-dog is funnier—and the combination is one of the author's most hilarious stories.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

JEFF BAKER'S lean greyhound "Telegraph" was taking up more of Strawberry Street in his progress than Latham Hooper felt one dog was entitled to, especially in the face of impending events.

"Whut de matter wid yo' dawg, Jeff?" he inquired.

"He aint know which one of me to foller," said Jeff.

"Aint know which *one* of you to foller! Boy, when you git to be twins?"

"Aint twins: hit's liquor."

Latham sniffed hopefully—also fruitlessly. "Caint smell nothin' on you," he voiced his further perplexity.

"Aint on *me*," Jeff deepened the mystery. "Dat's whut's de trouble: Telegraph git in my drinkin'-liquor an' lap hisse'f up 'nough fo' two dawgs. He been watchin' both of me gwine down de street ever since—keep on follerin' de wrong one, an' den crossin' over to git right. But dat aint nothin'—you ought see whut *gin* make him do!"

"You better be thinkin' 'bout Samson 'stead of gin."

"Done off of Samson G. Bates. Samson think caint no business be did round heah widout him hawnin' in on hit. Play wid him, an' he gits de melon, while you gits de rind. Dat huccome I aint mess wid him no mo'. Dey's *two* business men on de Hill now, an' I aims to be both of 'em. Gittin' up dis heah dawg Derby all by my ownse'f: Samson jes' finish list'nin' to me tellin' him he aint in on hit."

Latham looked at Jeff as spectators regard a man about to go over Niagara in a barrel—a mixture of admiration and sympathy. Jeff had just committed the Demopolis equivalent of telling Wall Street where to get off, which made the future take on new interest.

And, as it was to appear shortly, there was more to the subject of dog-racing this time than met the eye.

"You watch Samson, den." Latham shook his head dubiously at the thought. "—And Selma too," he added.

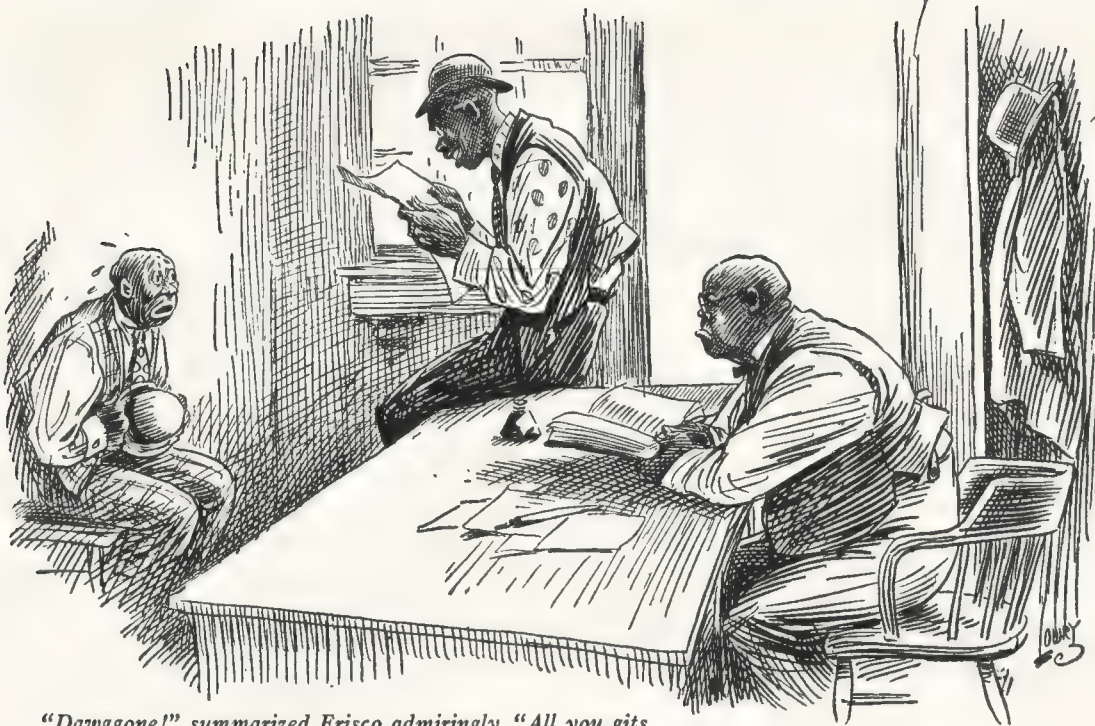
"Whut you mean, watch Selma?"

"Means dem boys been tryin' git yo' dawg-race moved to Selma, dat's whut."

"Huccome?" Jeff's interest rose notably.

"Dey say de gate-receipts be bigger. Aint sound like de real reason to me."

"Me neither. Whut dem boys is after is git de race moved over dar whar dey can fix hit 'gainst you an' me. Only way hold a race honest is have hit right heah whar us can fix hit our ownse'ves—fo' D'mop'lis to win."



"Dawggone!" summarized Frisco admiringly. "All you gits to keep is yo' shirt an' de use of one shoe!"

"Aint no luck in bein' honest away from home."

"Old Telegraph win hit too," continued Jeff, "if dem Selma boys aint put no ground-glass nor nothin' in he eatin'-vittles to slow him down. Dat dawg follers a mean toy rabbit when he git in a race!"

"Hit jes' bein' two dawgs in de race—Telegraph an' dat Selma boy Owl-eye's dawg Radio—make hit easier to watch 'em," observed Latham. "Dat all you got look out fo', Jeff—sides Samson."

"Whut Samson got do wid hit? Aint I jes' tell you he's out?" exploded Jeff. "Done told him whar to head in."

"Samson aint never out twel de money's counted! Whar you gwine now?"

"Home." Jeff sank farther into depression.

"Dey's plenty other places open yit."

"Yeah, but Angie done 'spectin' me 'bout somep'n, she say."

Latham looked sympathetic. Angie was the sort of woman a husband didn't disappoint but once. She was not only twice Jeff's size, but she put out twice as many words to the minute.

Jeff drifted on up Hogan's Alley without benefit of clergy. In fact, the clergy had been largely responsible for the situation he was about to face there! Once, when he had made a lot of promises in front of one of them that Angie had been holding him to ever since; and again when one of the cloth had appointed her head of the social committee at Zion Predestinarian church.

Jeff sidled through his gate, envying Telegraph who promptly went under the house.

"Heah *you* come!" Angie opened fire when she could see the whites of his apprehensive eyes. "Not a hunk of meat or a speck of meal in de house, an' you an' dat dawg loafin' round de streets all de time! I wants money, you heah me? 'Pawtant money—to git me a new dress wid fo' de big chu'ch meetin' next week!"

Jeff tried a new tune to an old song. "Jes' fixin' git money in now," he bulletined at a safe distance. "Business man now, from de knees up! Dat's me. Aint let Samson G. Bates handle all de business on de Hill no mo'. Done fixin' shove him off de roost wid dis heah dawg-race. Run hit my ownse'f. And soon's de race over, I gwine be lousy wid money."

Angie knew Jeff. "Look heah, runt!" she surrounded

him. "T's got a big office an' no dress. You better not lemme show up in no old rag to fill hit in, neither. Next Sat'day's de *last day* dat lyin' an' alibi-in' gwine git you nothin' wid me! After dat I takes action an' you takes med'cine fo' whut I does to you! You heah me?"

"Quit hollerin' in my ear. Done told you I git you up de money. Got go see a boy up de Hill 'bout hit now." And Jeff slid out before matters reached the skillet-throwing stage.

But up on Baptist Hill he merely collected more misery, via Latham.

"Dem Selma boys done workin' on you *right*, now," Mr. Hooper greeted him from a barbecue-stand stool. "Jes' seen dat Owl-eye boy from over dar. Say he 'bleeged to win dis year. So whut you reckon he done?"

Jeff looked about for Telegraph. He knew and feared Selma's sporting ethics—they were too much like his own.

"He aint see Tel'graph yit," Latham covered that fear first. "Whut he done is he put up 'leven dollars, pussonal, to guarantee good faith is he git de dawg-race moved over to Selma."

"Put hit up wid who?"

"Dat de trick in hit. He post de money pussonal wid Samson G. Bates. Dat give Samson dat much mo' money to work wid, an' put him in de way of competin' wid you by givin' Owl-eye a chance to race in Selma. Is Owl-eye not race heah, you got to race dar, aint you?"

Jeff's forehead corrugated like a washboard. The only thing that could talk him out of this threatened jam would be more money—put up with Samson too, to offset Selma's deposit and keep Samson from starting opposition. The lion's share of the gate would go to the promoter on the home grounds too. All of which were reasons why Demopolis must retain the race if Jeff were to profit as planned. Jeff hated to think what would happen to him now should there be no profits. And the first essential of his winning the race of his own promoting was that it be held at Demopolis where no Selma sportsman could tamper with his dog. But already Selma had said "eleven dollars" in a language that Jeff could only whisper in. If he had eleven dollars he wouldn't need to race!

"Sho' is fixin' tie me up in a knot," mourned Jeff as he regarded the horns of his new dilemma.

"Samson always is tie a boy up in a knot whut try to buck him in business," Latham pointed out.

Telegraph sat down suddenly in the dust to try to remedy some outside trouble with a frantic hind leg. Jeff sank deeper into his clothes and sighed that his own difficulties could not be remedied so directly.

"Aint no way to be sho' of winnin' dat race 'cep'n to have hit heah in D'mop'lis," he returned mournfully to inescapable first principles.

"Dat whut Owl-eye an' Samson figures."

In a final frenzied burst of scratching, Telegraph dislodged his tormentor and looked up, wagging his tail in triumphant relief. Something hopeful in his new mental attitude suddenly seemed to communicate itself to his owner. Jeff looked startled at what had just occurred inside his own brain. He hadn't realized his own strength in that department before!

"—Trouble wid Samson," he began thinking aloud under the stimulus of it, "he aint never buck a smart man befo'. But he messin' wid Jeff Baker now! An' I *could* do hit—"

"Do whut?"

The only way Jeff could do heavy thinking was out loud. "—Wid me gittin' up de race an' winnin' hit—if hit's held in D'mop'lis—I's 'bleeged to have Tel'graph in hit, aint I?" his further thoughts vocalized and crystalized into a question.

"You aint say nothin' new yit—"

"—An' *dat* jes' he'p de s'curity to look better, aint hit?"

"All you does is ax questions!" complained Latham impatiently. "How 'bout answerin' some? Whut you gwine do wid Tel'graph?"

"Gwine *maw'gage* him!"

"Huh?"

"Gwine borrow money on him. An' put him up as s'curity fo' de loan. Borrers hit, an' den pays hit off an' bails him back out jes' befo' de race, after I done fix hit to keep de race heah by puttin' up de money I borrers to offset Selma's money. Make us even den, an' dey caint move hit."

"Whut you gwine pay off de maw'gage *wid*, though?"

"Wid de money from de gate-receipts, ign'ant! Dat whar runnin' de race my ownse'f come in, 'stead of lettin' Samson in on hit—de gate-money, 'bove 'spenses an' Selma's split, be all mine. Soon as de grandstand git full an' de race ready to start, I rushes round an' bails out Tel'graph so he can race. All business—from de knees up! Dat's me."

Latham's expression indicated that his brain was still limping along in the rear of a fast thinker like Jeff was developing into.

"Look like you figurin' yo' connections pow'ful close!"—and he shook his head dubiously. "'Sides, whar at you gwine borrow no 'leven dollars?"

"Aint no sense in business, de white folks says," misquoted Jeff impressively. "So can git 'leven dollars from anybody whut want de int'rest on a good loan. Aims to borrow Selma's 'leven dollars from Samson G. Bates, an' den leave hit up wid him. Dat way he git de int'rest an' aint put out nothin'; an' D'mop'lis gits de race widout no mo' fussin' 'round. Dat mean I wins hit an' gits de hawg's share of de gate-money; 'sides pawnin' de cup I wins fo' Angie's dress-money."

"All right, boy; you borrers from Samson, den. But dey's a trick in hit, all I got to say. An' I aint gwine put no X-mark on de bottom no note, neither: dat Samson Bates collects or cripples. Dis time he liable do both."

"Aint need you sign no note. Ol' Tel'graph dawg 'tend to dat—he stay tied up in Samson's back yard twel us pays back de 'leven dollars loan. Den I takes him out to de track right quick an' wins de race wid him."

"Lay off dat *us*," corrected Latham. "Twel *you* pays back de 'leven dollars, you means."

"Wid jes' two dawgs to enter, hit git paid back all right or dey aint no race—"

"—'Cep'n 'tween you an' 'bout fo' hundred niggers whut paid to git in an' see dawg-race," again amended Latham. "Too many people got to git paid off *first* befo' dis race start, fo' one boy to handle, look like to me."

"Nemmind dat: you watch me go into Samson's place wid my dawg an' come out wid money. Trouble wid you, you aint never seed a couple of *business* men op'rate befo'!"

Latham couldn't tell by his face as Jeff shuffled down Baptist Hill next morning how he had come out with the local Wolf of Wall Street. All that was certain was that no longer was Jeff's four-footed collateral trotting at his heels.

"Like as not, Samson done fo'close on dat dawg," muttered Latham to himself. Then, to Jeff, "Is you git de money?"

Jeff groaned and felt of himself at several places, including his pants pockets.

"Sho' is!" he admitted gloomily.

"How much int'rest he charge you?"

"Gimme li'l med'cine," requested Jeff feebly. "Jes' any kind: needs hit ev'y time I thinks 'bout dat int'rest."

"Aint got nothin' on me but li'l gin—"

"Lemme step in heah an' wrop myse'f round li'l of dat, den," Jeff revived slightly. Then, as he later replaced the cork: "Tel'graph sho' would like a shot of dat if he wuz heah! Dat dawg suttainly likes gin: trouble is, gin aint like him."

"Whut hit do?"

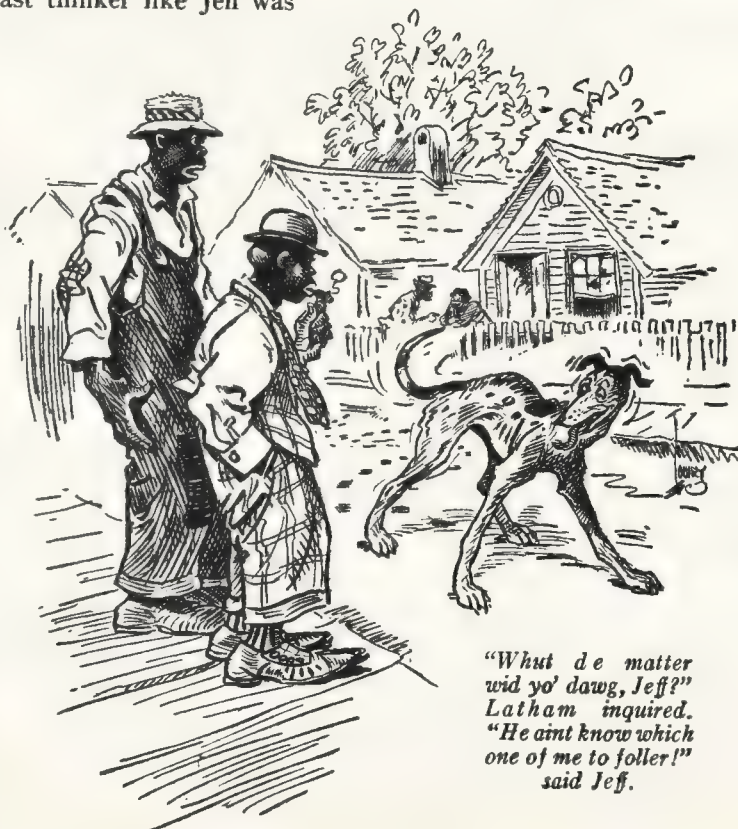
"*Hit* aint do nothin'—hit's whut hit make *him* do."

—Takes five acres an' four men to hold dat dawg when he wrop hisse'f 'round passel of gin—jes' as soon as hit git time to work on him li'l while."

"How much wuz de int'rest dat Samson charge you?"

"Fo'teen dollars—on 'leven dollars, fo' one week. An' Samson done tie Tel'graph up to he back fence, fo' s'curity. I wuz 'bleeged to do hit, an' Samson sho' soak me! I got to pay him de princ'pal an' int'rest in full too, he say, or aint git my dawg back. When Samson trades, he wuss'n a cyclone!"

"Whut you got to watch wid dat boy," reiterated Latham cautiously, "is did you sign nothin'."



"Whut de matter wid yo' dawg, Jeff?"
Latham inquired.
"He aint know which one of me to foller!"
said Jeff.

"Is a fish swim? Puts my X on de bottom one dese heah papers."

Jeff hauled forth from the interior of his over-large garments an impressive document.

"Dis my copy," he stated.

"Aint like de looks of hit," concluded Latham after a full minute's careful scrutiny.

"How you know you aint? You caint read neither."

"You aint got nothin' on me, at dat. Whut I means, when piece paper comes out of Samson's office wid writin' at de top an' yo' mark at de bottom, all you liable see of luck after dat is jes' de tail-light gwine 'way from you."

"Dat becaze you aint never see Samson messed up wid a smart man befo'!"

Jeff fell back on an ancient device for covering uneasiness up with a lot of words. Moreover, Samson had been unusually affable about this most recent deal—too affable, in fact, to fit the picture of a vanquished rival.

"Now you aint got nobody to watch den, but dat Owl-eye boy whut own Radio," reminded Latham.

"He aint gwine have no luck messin' wid a smart man neither," Jeff started a four-day strut. "When I 'tends to business, halfwits takes cover!"

Jeff grew increasingly important around Demopolis. Word—but without details—of how he had successfully bucked that financial wizard Samson G. Bates drifted about, and brought him admiring invitations from others of Samson's debtors, to eat, drink, and be merry at their expense, up to fifteen cents' worth.

Owl-eye, of Selma, hung darkly about in the offing, with his dog Radio discreetly left at home.

In fact, it took Owl-eye two days to locate where Jeff's dog was tied up. Why he was so tied did not enter into the discussion in his case. He was too busy with something else—in the dispatch of which he occupied two days more in finding out that a business proposition would be acceptable to Jeff's closest friend, Latham. Latham had Jeff's own word for it that there was no place for sentiment in business. In the end, Latham had five dollars, which was a matter both private and unprecedented.

Jeff continued to be a big man everywhere but in his own home. No matter how drunk with praise and power a bow-legged dorky with knots on his head might get around Strawberry Street barbecue-stands, he sank to his own level when he shuffled into Hogan's Alley after night-fall. And if all the other places had shut up, Angie hadn't—she had just started when he arrived. However vague Jeff might actually be about that new church dress of hers, Angie was perfectly definite and vocal about it yet. Trouble with Angie, Jeff groaned to himself beneath her onslaughts, was she couldn't recognize a business-man after she had married him. She was all the time pawing over his past record and using it against him.

This kept Jeff checking and re-checking his scheme for flaws. He couldn't afford a flash in the pan now. And it all checked up: he had out-manuevered Selma and Samson with the borrowed eleven dollars; he had assured Angie's dress by retaining the race in Demopolis where Telegraph could win a perfectly pawnable cup; and—soundest of all—public interest already guaranteed a good gate. This last made the final detail of redeeming the hocked Telegraph just before he should enter the race a mere matter of routine.

Before the steady flow of Angie's personalities Jeff hunched his shoulders then and rammed his dog-eared copy of his

loan agreement with Samson deeper into his pocket. When everything was over, Angie could apologize!

In the racing arena borrowed from the white folks for the scene of the great Demopolis Dog Derby, all was life, gayety, and hot fish sandwiches. Admiring spectators chattered among themselves, and watched the mechanical rabbit make its trial spins about the track under the hand of Latham, Jeff's friend and assistant.

In which pleasant excitement the zero hour drew on, with the grandstand filling gratifyingly. Before it Professor Alexander Dinghouse, Baptist Hill's leading one-man was stationed, and music swelled the breeze. Jeff himself was all over the lot. Gladstone Smith, regarded as sufficiently dull-witted to be honest, was at the ticket-window. Already more than twenty-five dollars had been taken in, Jeff assured himself on his latest flying trip there. The bailing out of Telegraph was down to a mere detail now.

Once more Jeff strutted before the grandstand, and listened to the ripple of comment he felt his appearance was rousing there.

"All business—from de knees up!" murmured Jeff of himself to himself. "An' gittin' 'bout time to win dis heah race now, an' git rid of Angie's squawkin' round 'bout dat dress."

"Come on, Latham! Let's us go git Tel'graph now!" he invited that functionary jovially. "Us stop by de ticket-winder an' git de money from Gladstone, den hurry back wid de dawg an' win dis heah race."

But Latham seemed strangely reluctant. "Jes' been up dar," he demurred. "Aint look right fo' me to go so much."

He fussed with the controls of the mechanical rabbit, with averted gaze.

Jeff paused suspiciously. A big man all the time had to be watching out to keep from being double-crossed. But the rabbit was operating perfectly. If there were any chicanery in the offing, it could hardly be on Latham's part.



"Tel'graph t'ar loose from dat 'ar escrow an' show up at de dawg-track all broke out wid speed."

"Got stay heah an' tend to dis rabbit," Latham was looking at the sun in lieu of a watch. "You go git de dawg yo' ownse'f."

Jeff was too busy to fool. Besides, he wasn't anxious to be seen in public any more with a mere odd-job boy like Latham. He was fixing to become important people, as soon as he won this race.

"Be back in few minutes wid him," he therefore acquiesced in Latham's refusal. "Hold ev'ything twel Tel-graph gits heah now."

One might say that Samson G. Bates was expecting Jeff with no little anticipatory pleasure. It was in his smile, his purr, as he greeted his caller in the doorway with:

"Come right in, Mist' Baker! Business is business—which remind me: How is de dawg-racin' business comin' 'long?"

"Gittin' on good." Jeff was reaching hastily into his pockets for twenty-five dollars of the gate receipts. "An' I got to work fast too. Grandstand full of niggers r'arin' to see dat dawg-race now. Old Owl-eye prancin' round itchin' fo' he dawg to git licked. Heah yo' money—'leven dollars princ'pal an'—ouch!—fo'teen dollars int'rest. An' now whar at my dawg Tel-graph? Craves to git gwine wid him—not keep de cust'mers waitin'."

Samson counted the money twice, then placed it in a drawer—and locked the drawer. A moment for which he had been waiting, one might gather from his manner, had now come; and he proposed to enjoy it.

"Mist' Baker," he observed heavily, "dey is right smart talk been gwine 'bout dat you considers yo'se'f nothin' but brains from de knees up. An' dat you is aimin' to shove me off de roost, speakin' in a business way. Is I got you right?"

Jeff started. Sounded like somebody had been quoting him too accurately for comfort.

Samson took his nervousness for an answer. "In which case," he resumed ponderously, "I could give you pow'ful heap of good advice. But some niggers l'arns slower through de ears dan any other way—specially de smart-aleck kind."

Jeff felt himself going down without knowing why.

"—While 'sperience," continued Samson, "is been known to make a smart man out of a fool faster'n most anything else."

Jeff squirmed inside his clothes. Samson might have a lot of time to talk, but *he* hadn't—not with all those cash customers waiting over there in the grandstand to see a dog-race. More dog and less talk was what Jeff needed.

"Has to git gwine," he voiced his urgency. "Got to git Tel-graph now an' see you 'bout all dem lies later. Caint hold no dawg-race widout Tel-graph."

"Prezactly!" agreed Mr. Bates. "And is you got copy de loan 'greement on you?"

"Sho is. An' I done paid you back de princ'pal an'—ouch!—int'rest too. Craves my dawg."

"An' is you read dat 'greement?" pressed Samson.

"Not yit—been gittin' my glasses mended dis week," stalled Jeff, who could not have read with the help of an oculist's entire stock.

"So? Well, I aint gwine read hit to you—but I sho' vises you to git hit read. Because I stands by it. Aint nobody say I busts a contract—or lets one git busted on me. Git anybody to read hit to you you keers to, but you reads hit befo' you takes yo' dawg away—so you understand hit mo' better."

Jeff might be all business above the knees, but he was getting all aflutter below them. Something he couldn't put his finger on was in Samson's manner and in the air. Afar he heard the murmur of his customers impatiently awaiting the promised and paid-for contest.

"Frisco's jes' outside—might save time to git him read

hit to you," suggested Mr. Bates blandly. "Frisco! C'm' in heah!"

The erudite Frisco proved not only able but anxious to display his abilities. He scanned the paper Jeff handed him with increasing interest that included the certified mark of Mr. Baker, the signature of two reliable witnesses, and a notarial seal at the bottom.

"Dawggone!" he summarized admiringly when he had finished. "Dat's a contract whut is a contract! All you gits to keep is yo' shirt an' de use of one shoe, Jeff."

"Means which?" gurgled the now

thoroughly apprehensive Jeff. What Latham had been saying was still coming back to him.

"Meanin' dat you is done signed yo'self up to de legal effect dat you puts up one greyhound dawg as s'curity for a 'leven-dollar loan. An' dat five days after you repays back de loan, wid int'rest, you gits yo' dawg back. Twel den he remains in ex—in es—in escrow. Meanin' chained up in Samson's back yard. Hit—Whut de matter wid you, black boy?"

For the first time in his life, Jeff was unable to speak for himself! All he could do was stagger blindly about the room and crow hoarsely, before he collapsed in the nearest chair like a wet sack, as the cruel import of what he had signed—but not read—penetrated the last outposts of his intellect. He had signed himself into a trap! Samson had sunk him! Big talk had become a big boomerang!

"You means," croaked Jeff at length, "dat de paper say I aint git my dawg back twel five days after I pays Samson de loan?"

"Dat whut yo' contract say."

Jeff grew as goggle-eyed as a bug. "B-b-but," he was stammering in his anguish, "whut 'bout de cust'mers? Grandstand done full of niggers whut done pay me to git in! An' I done paid Samson heah their gate-money now!



"Mist' Baker," panted the judge, "us sho' had a hard time gittin' hold of you to present you wid dis trophy!"

Owl-eye dar wid he dawg; an' he win by default, is I aint git Tel'graph in dat race quick! Angie done lookin' to me fo' dat new dress! Ev'ything dependin' on Tel'graph—an' Samson done got him tied up back heah in dat 'ar escrow!"

"—Which sounds 'xactly like de list of things whut you ought to thunk of befo' you goes bellerin' round wid yo' frawg-mouth 'bout how you gwine shove me off de roost," countered Samson triumphantly. "But, co'se, a boy whut's all brains 'bove de knees, like you is, aint mind li'l thing like dat. Why dey tells me you been puttin' out dat dey's two business men on de Hill now—an' dat you's both of dem! Rally yo' brains, den, Big Business—an' remember I collects or cripples!"

Jeff rallied not his mind but his legs. There was going to be either a dog-race or a foot-race in Demopolis within the hour. In the latter case, participants would be Jeff Baker and about four hundred spectators wanting their money back—in which event, nothing but the legs being mightier than the sword could save him. And Jeff, was weaker in the limbs, if anything, than in the brain! All he could do was return and face the music: refund the foremost and outrun the reduced numbers of the hindmost.

With all the nerve and snap of a sick snake with bunnions, Jeff thereupon crawled forth from the scene of one defeat to the locale of an impending far larger one.

Nearer, ahead, sounded wild cheering now that jolted him anew, cheering that kept mounting until it swelled to frenzy. Even in his misery, Jeff paused to puzzle at this. He knew more about what was going on and going to happen than any forty of those spectators—and *he* wasn't cheering, he reflected mournfully.

The grandstand came into view. Inexplicable applause and cheering still rent the air.

Then the stand was aboil! Jeff saw them coming and shivered. Coming down from the stand, swarming upon the track, running hither and yon like ants—until they spied Jeff! Instantly a wave of them headed for him at top speed. At which Jeff lost control of himself below the knees. . . .

Getting Baptist Hill's newest big-business man out of the culvert which had loomed welcomely ahead of him at the close of the first fast half-mile proved no small job. Clamoring denizens of the Hill clustered and chattered about both ends of it. Jeff shrank toward its mathematical middle, his eyes bulging, his lungs panting like a pump. Advocates of dogs and digging could be heard by him yielding to the superior strategy of those advocating the burning of a little damp brush in one end. Jeff stuck out the first onslaught of the lighted smudge nobly, until some genius thought of shoving the smudge gradually in Jeff's direction with a long pole—which brought him out like a scorched rabbit.

Seven strong men had trouble in holding him at that, smoke-blinded though he was. And even when he got his eyes open he couldn't believe his sight!

For the judges in the race were confronting him with the cup—when he had had no race!

JEFF rubbed his stinging eyes and peered anew. To perceive this time that Angie was hanging on one of his arms too, smiling coyly at him. Now Jeff *knew* his eyes were lying to him!

"Mist' Baker," panted the cup-bearing judge, "us sho' had a hard time gittin' hold of you to present you wid dis trophy as de winner of de gre't D'mop'lis dawg Derby—by fawty feet. An' yo' modesty sho' is make us burn heap of bresh!"

Jeff rubbed his smoke-filled eyes and blinked some more. Telegraph had been tied up in the hard-hearted Samson's

back yard—in escrow—yet here Jeff was being congratulated on winning a race he had not participated in—that had not even been held, by all the evidence in his possession. This thing was getting harder to understand all the time! More had evidently happened than he could figure out. But the big thing, for all that, was to grab opportunity—and the cup—by the forelock!

"Keep dis heah fo' me, Angie, honey," he breathed hoarsely in her direction as he handed her the cup, "twel de dress sto' opens tomorrer! —And now," he launched into oratory, "on beha'f of de management, I thank ev'ybody an' 'sures you hit wasn't nothin' but my untirin' efforts whut win de dawg Derby fo' D'mop'lis! An' whut I wants know is, whar at dat lop-eared Latham?"

"Dat whut Owl-eye want know too!" chirruped an unimportant but well-informed spectator from the rear.

BUT Latham—and the explanation—was not yet to be found. Indeed, it was not until late the following forenoon—with Angie Baker already parading Hogan's Alley in sartorial splendor—that Latham came to light, in the unused space beneath the old freight-depot, where he had spent the night under the advice of his physician and three close friends.

"Is dat Owl-eye boy gone home yit?" was Latham's first and most significant question, when Jeff had spotted him and dragged him fearfully forth.

"Done left out of heah down de Selma road wid Radio—walkin'. Owl-eye so broke dis maw'nin' he couldn't buy cig'rette-paper. Ev'ybody say he thunk he had dat race sewed up. Dat whut I wants talk to *you* 'bout."

"I had stay under heah twel I finds out Owl-eye gone," explained Latham amazingly, "on 'count li'l double-crossin' whut I gits mixed up on—"

"On or *in*?" questioned Jeff suspiciously. His mind was going back to that mechanical rabbit.

Latham dug into the dust indecisively with one toe. "Li'l of both—befo' I gits through," he stated guardedly. "You say Tel'graph wins?"

"Him or he ghost: I leaves him tied up in Samson's yahd—time I gits to de track ev'ybody say he done win de race. I aint see him since."

"Old Owl-eye," Latham mumbled, "ax me whut I charge him to drap a li'l somep'n in Tel'graph's vittles befo' de race. He know whar Tel'graph at but aint pester to find out *why* he dere. So I tells him five dollars. An' he gives hit to me—dat whar at I double-crosses *you*—"

"You means," struggled Jeff with a set of contradictory facts, "dat you gits five bucks from dat Owl-eye nigger to double-cross *me*?" He reached toward a loose brick.

"Gimme dat brick, somebody!" he commanded sharply.

"Hold on! Lemme finish!" demurred Latham hastily. "After he gimme de five, Owl-eye ax whut's good thing to put in Tel'graph's vittles to slow him down—an' dat's whar at I starts double-crossin' *him*—"

"*Him*?"

"Yeah. Dat huccome Tel'graph t'ar loose from dat 'ar escrow an' show up at de dawg-track all broke out wid speed an' r'arin to win—wid half a panel of Samson's fence still draggin' behind him! 'Count of whut I draps in he vittles—"

Memory was beginning to aid Jeff in seeing light in great darkness. "Yeah? Whut you do to Tel'graph after Owl-eye give you five bucks to slow him down befo' de race, huh?" he demanded.

"Jes' whut you talkin' 'bout all time—I jes' shifts de double-crossin' about a li'l bit—from you to Owl-eye—an' fill up Tel'graph's water-pan wid a big fence-bustin' shot of whut you say makes him fast and wild—*gin*! He aint wait no five days to bust out of dat escrow *den*!"

Children of the Range

By JAY LUCAS

Both went for their guns; a double roar echoed in the saloon; then he was riding fast and far—a murderer.

Illustrated by Vladimir Cherkoff



I WISH you could see it my way, Dan. The cattle business is having the worst depression in years. That means, of course, that a cow-town bank like mine is hard hit. Just between the two of us, I'm having a mighty hard time to keep above water—mighty hard!”

The big young man with the big white face swung around in his mahogany swivel-chair, and tapped the expanse of shining desk before him with a fountain-pen.

“Yeah!” grunted the other, shortly.

“I’m surely sorry—but with things so bad, it’s out of the question to renew your note. Wish I could, Dan.”

The young cattleman standing at the other side of the desk shifted his feet, his spurs tinkling nervously. He was smaller than the other, more slender. His dark face and flashing black eyes seemed to hint of a trace of Indian blood, and of the fiery, ungovernable temper that goes with it. Now his face was pale with anger, and there was a dangerous glitter in his eyes. His lips were tight-drawn, and moved silently a time or two before he spoke:

“You’ve been goin’ over that for the last half-hour, Charley, but all I can see is this: For a dirty five thousand, you’re goin’ to foreclose on my outfit. I tell you that in less than three months, after I sell the steers, I can pay you in full—with any interest you want.”

“Sorry, Dan—but banking is banking. I can’t see my way to renew your note.”

“No! But when my outfit goes up at a sheriff’s sale, you’ll likely buy it for a song, won’t you? I know times is hard right now—there’ll be no one to bid against you.”

The big young man with the white face was losing his temper—a thing he rarely permitted himself to do.

“Dan,”—he spoke sharply,—“we’re not talking about what’ll happen at the sale. I said I can’t renew your note, and that settles it.” Then his usual suave business manner returned, and he added quickly: “Surely sorry, Dan!”

He swung his chair around and picked up a pile of papers which he began to shuffle. It was as good as an order for the other to get out.

“Charley,” blurted the cowboy, his face flaming, “you’re a damn’ dirty skin-flint, jest like yore father before you.

You’ve got banks in four towns around here now—an’ how did you get ’em? Suckin’ the blood from hard-workin’ cattlemen!”

The pile of papers flopped back on the desk. The swivel-chair squeaked suddenly, and Charley was on his feet, towering in rage.

“Get out,” he roared, “before I throw you out! You damned poverty-stricken cattlemen give me a pain—always coming around wailing about something! Why can’t you take your medicine like a man?”

The young cattleman’s face went ghastly white with fury.

“You—you’ll throw me out, Charley, will you? You’re not man enough, you dirty skunk, and never were!”

He strode around the expanse of desk, heedless of the fact that he had upset a vase of flowers, drenching the expensive carpet beside the little table on which they had stood.

“Hop to it, Charley! Throw me out!”

The big young man looked composed, but his hands were twitching nervously.

“Now, Dan, there’s no use in getting hot. Let’s sit down and reason—”

“Take that, damn you!”

Dan Carson had struck right into the center of that big white face. Slender though he was, his life in the saddle had given him muscles of taut steel. The other crashed heavily back against the wall.

“Dan—Dan! Listen!”

“You rotten skunk!”

Dan charged in like a wildcat, battering blindly with both fists. For a moment the other tried to fight back, but he saw instantly that despite his advantage of size, he was no match for the temper-crazed young man before him. His voice rose in a shout for assistance.

A typewriter crashed to the floor, and then Charley Richards went tumbling backward over his swivel-chair. There seemed to be more consternation than fear on his big face. Such a thing had never happened to him before!



There was an instant of silence; then a double crash rang out. There came a thud—a groan.

Dan felt his arms seized, as clerks came rushing into the private office. From the floor came Charley's voice:

"Get the sheriff! Have him locked up! He'll pay for this!"

And then Dan was outside the office, with Hankins, the old cashier, whispering in his ear:

"Get out, Dan—get out of town till he cools off! We'll say you broke away from us."

"Break! I'll break his dirty fat neck!"

"Don't be a fool, Dan—get out as fast as you can!"

He felt himself pushed into the street, and heard the bank door slam after him. For a moment he hesitated, and then strode quickly toward the livery-stable where his horse and six-shooter were. Which should he use, the horse or the gun? A bullet through the fat stomach—that was what Charley Richards deserved! But— Oh, hell! He might as well get out of town—go some place where he was not known and look for a job! His little outfit on Rattlesnake Cañon—he had been born and reared there; he loved every stony, barren gulch and hillside of it, every brown log of the old corrals.

Who'd have thought Charley would do that—to him! They had gone to school together—played on the same baseball team. But when their fathers had died within a year of each other, Charley Richards inherited four banks and a strangle-hold on half the cattlemen within a hundred miles, while Dan found himself with a few miles of poor range, a small herd of cattle, and a tumbledown ranchhouse. . . . And, of course, a mortgage!

Who'd have thought it of Charley! But he had never been the same since going East to college, and spending those two years in New York banks, learning the latest wrinkles in high finance. Dan had not gone to any college. In fact he had not quite finished high school, for his father's health was failing at the time, and the boy had to help with the spring round-up and horse-breaking.

Dan buckled on his six-shooter and swung into the saddle. He'd go back to the ranch, and put his bed on another horse. Then he'd head for Prescott—that was a sort of headquarters for cowboys seeking work in northern Arizona. —Riding down the road leading a bed-horse—looking for a job! And just a month before, he had told old

Stevens to hold a few good grade Hereford bulls for him and he'd buy them after the steer-sales. He had planned to better the breed of his cattle. *His* cattle! Charley Richards' cattle they were, now!

Out on the edge of town, he came to a large, weatherbeaten building with the front door boarded up. Why nail it up that way? Everyone knew that it was a full-fledged saloon, just as it had been before Arizona, and then the rest of the United States, gravely pretended to go dry. Everyone knew that the back door stood wide open almost all day and all night, and that trucks were frequently unloaded back there in the alley.

Dan had never been a drinker. He found his hot head difficult enough to control when he was sober. Just once in his life he had been drunk—and in that same saloon. A quarrel had started, over no one knew what. Guns had been drawn—Dan's own the first. Had some one not almost broken his wrist with a bottle, he

would have killed Dicky O'Neil, his best friend. He shivered at the thought of it. That was almost three years ago, and he had not tasted whisky since. He had learned his lesson.

Should he go back and empty his gun into Charley Richards? Of all the dirty treachery—wanting to grab his little outfit! "Oh, hell!" he grunted again.

And then, on a sudden impulse, he swung his horse off the street and back into the alley. He tied it to a hitching-rack, and strode through the open door.

"Give me a drink," he ordered.

"What you want, Dan?"

"I don't give a damn; strongest you have—tequila!"

The bartender glanced at him uneasily. Dan Carson and his temper were well known—that Indian streak from way back somewhere. But the bartender shrugged slightly, as though saying it was none of his business. He reached behind him to a well-stocked shelf, and placed a bottle of fiery tequila—cactus whisky—on the bar.

The burning, cactus-flavored liquor seemed to sear Dan's throat, but he tossed it down with one gulp. And then a second glass, and a third.

"Easy on that, Dan," warned the bartender. "It's high-powered stuff! Want to start climbin' telephone-poles an' divin' off?"

"Eli, jest mind yore own affairs, will you? I'll drink all I want to an' pay for it, too. *Sabe?*"

He threw a five-dollar bill on the bar—his last cent—and again filled his glass. The bartender looked concerned as he wiped first a glass and then his face. Dan Carson was a prince—everyone admitted that. But if he got tanked up, there was sure to be trouble for some one—bad trouble. A voice came from the other end of the bar:

"Set 'em up again, Eli!"

He hastened down, the frown of anxiety deepening. Another hot-head was there, staggering somewhat uncertainly on his high heels. If he and Dan happened to clash—well, it was better not to think of what would happen. Eli could remember the day when a shooting-scape in a saloon was almost an everyday affair. But now it would mean the closing of the place, and perhaps a long jail term for himself.

"Who's the peeved-lookin' gent up front, Eli?"

"Fer Gawd's sake, don't talk so loud. It's Dan Carson, and he's pretty wild when he's drinkin'—or when he's sober, for that matter!"

"Oh, he is, is he? Well, he aint runnin' no blazers on no one here!"

He had spoken loudly on purpose. Eli glanced along the bar apprehensively. Yes, Dan had heard! He stood swaying uncertainly near the door, his eyes hard fixed upon the stranger.

"Talkin' about me, stranger?" he drawled sneeringly.

"I might be, at that."

So it had come! Eli edged his way toward the safe, preparatory to ducking behind it. The others in the room were scattering hastily, some through the door, a few behind the bar. Both of those men had guns. Of course there was an ordinance against carrying guns in town, but cowboys were tacitly permitted to leave them on until they had reached the livery-stable on entering town, and then again when leaving. Most of the cowboys wore forty-fives, but the days of gun-fighting were about over. Cowboys had votes, and a sheriff wanted to keep on the good side of them. A man couldn't leave his gun stuck in a bush outside town, and have it stolen or get rusty.

"Stranger," Dan was drawling, "are you takin' that back?"

"Not jest exactly. What you goin' to do about it?"

There was an instant of silence. Then the bartender dropped behind the safe as a double crash rang out. There came a thud—a groan.

Now there was a sound of running feet, tinkling spurs, a shuffling in the alley as some one mounted hastily. And then rapid hoof-beats growing gradually fainter. Eli peered forth, and then stood up and looked over the bar.

"He got him!" he blurted.

There was no need to examine the huddled figure on the floor, for Dan Carson was a dead shot. The men behind the bar came running forth, heading for the open door. The sooner they got out of there, the less trouble there would be for them. But two figures blocked their passage.

"Throw 'em up, everyone! What's the matter here? Good Lord! Who did that?"

The two deputy sheriffs were staring at the thing on the floor. Some one gave them a shaky answer:

"It was Dan Carson—he's gone."

"Who's this feller?"

"I—I don't know his name. Said he'd been workin' for the Flying Box over near Seligman, but got in a row with the foreman an' quit last week."

"What was the trouble between 'em?"

"Why—uh—nothin'—jest both honin' fer trouble."

One deputy spoke quickly to the other:

"Go get all the boys you can, an' I'll be saddling up some horses. That must have been Dan, racin' out the cañon road as we came in here."

Then, louder:

"Give me your names, everyone. Don't any of you leave town till we get back, unless you're honin' for trouble, too."

It was but a matter of minutes until the posse was on the trail; they knew that even seconds might count. Dan, looking back from the top of a high ridge, saw them. He was sober now, more sober than he had ever been in his life before. He had killed a man—practically shot him down in cold blood. What was it they had said to each other?

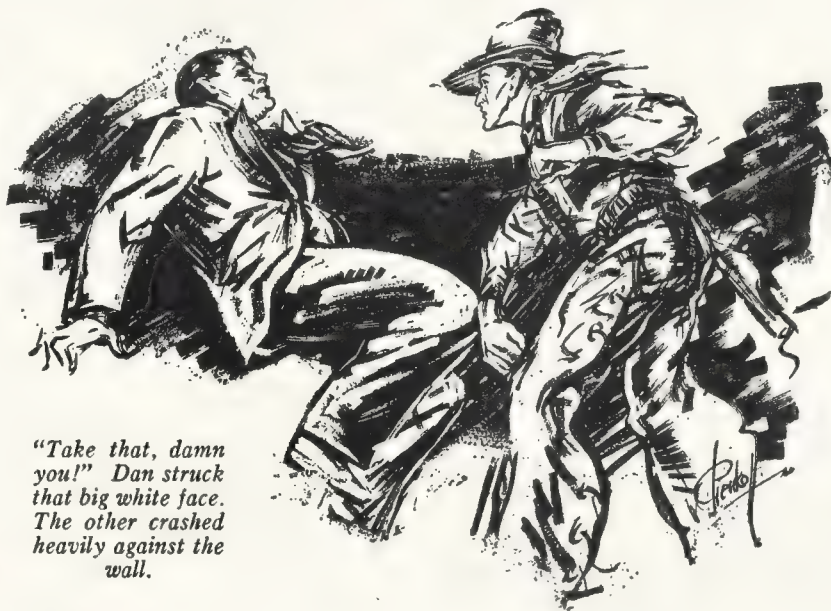
"Oh, God!" he groaned, as he whirled his horse and dashed, white-faced, down the other side of the ridge.

His horse was tired, for he had made a long ride that morning. They could soon overtake him. And his gun—where was it? He must have dropped it as he ran from the saloon. Perhaps it had fallen from the holster as he flung himself into the saddle. Anyway, it was gone, and he did not regret it. That gun had made him a murderer. What devilish, grinning prank of Fate had made him turn into the saloon?

Unconsciously he had headed toward his ranch, not very far from town. If he had time, he could get a fresh horse there; then he would stand a good chance to escape. Escape—to where? Telegraph- and telephone-wires stretched all over the State, and everyone had fast cars. It was not like in the old days, when a good horse meant safety from any possible pursuit. He thought wildly of stealing a car somewhere; it would be faster. But the roads were few, and could be easily watched. His miserable chance of escape on horseback was better.

There was but one faint spark of consolation. Sheriff Ellis was away from home—in Prescott, to bring back a prisoner the Yavapai sheriff was holding for him. When old Sheriff Ellis got after one, it was just as well to ride in and give up. Old Martin Ellis—he and Dan had been the closest of friends, and their little ranches stood side by side. Last time they had talked together, old Martin had gravely remarked that the two ranches should be one by rights, stretching, as they did, side by side along Rattlesnake Cañon. Mary had tossed her head angrily, and glared at her father. Dan had felt very uncomfortable; the old man shouldn't have said it, but he had what he probably thought was a dry sense of humor.

Mary Ellis. . . . Dan had had hopes— That is, if he had been able to pay off that note and get his little outfit on its feet. She had gone to school with him and Charley Richards. Charley often found business at the Ellis ranch; and who could blame him—Mary would make a wife of whom even a banker could feel proud. She had gone through high school and afterwards had kept on reading and learning things, as Dan had not had time to do. Could one blame her if she wanted to do something better than become the wife of a struggling young cattleman? But she did not show favors to either—she seemed to think more of her pet colts than of any man. Dan had never understood her, and knew he never could. Old Martin, honest old cowboy that he was, took no pains to conceal his belief that his daughter was none too good to marry another



"Take that, damn you!" Dan struck that big white face. The other crashed heavily against the wall.

cowboy—and that Dan was as good a cowboy as any of them. But Dan knew enough of human nature to see that this very parental favor was a strong point against him. If the old man had only ordered him off the place—But now that was all over, and he was a fugitive from swift-following justice!

He topped another high ridge, and saw his ranch-house below him. He glanced back; there was no sign of the posse. And then he saw it, on his right. They had taken the short cut across the cañon, and were almost to the house. Why had he not gone that way himself? His muddled, confused brain had been numb, and he had been riding blindly, taking the old familiar road through Jackson's Pass. There could be no fresh mount for him now, unless he could manage to steal one somewhere.

He swung back around the ridge, on the far side from the house, so as to keep out of sight. They might think he had passed, and keep straight on. His horse was in a lather of sweat, and was beginning to stagger. Might as well ride down there and give himself up—he could not escape. No, damned if he would—he'd walk till the soles of his boots were worn through before he'd do that! He would need his gun after all—he could bluff some one into swapping horses with him, into giving him something to eat when hunger forced him to approach some ranch. He headed down the old abandoned stage road, and his horse, in spite of all he could do, sagged into a staggering trot.

Then he saw Mary, sitting her horse, waiting for him, A dark, sun-tanned little face under the straight, shiny black hair. A slender figure, wiry as his own. A head poised like that of an empress.

"Dan, I was just going over to your place to see about some stray horses that— What—what's the matter?" she broke off suddenly, seeing his pale distracted face and the staggering, sweat-lathered horse.

A moment he sat staring at her in agony. How cold and impersonal she looked! Had she, after all, any feelings? Could she care for anyone? . . . Not, of course, that it mattered now.

"Mary, I—I killed a man. The posse is—is down at my place."

Her eyes widened in horror.

"Dan!"

The blood was leaving her face, but she spoke in tones cool as ice:

"It—it was self-defense, of course?"

Oh, how he wished he could die right there!

"No—jest—jest a drunken row over nothin'. I—I reckon it was my fault."

His head fell on his chest, and he started to ride by her, not daring to look up. And then came that calm, cold voice:

"Dan, take my horse—he's a good one. I can get back to the ranch on yours, and maybe turn him loose when anyone seeing him."

He did not believe his ears. She could not have said it! But she was already dismounting, slowly and deliberately. After all, had they not been children together? Probably she could not help feeling sorry for him.

"No, Mary, I'll be going on—I'll take my chances."

She seized his rein.

"Get down, I say! Hurry and get your saddle off."

Hardly knowing what he was doing, he loosed the cinch, and a moment later his heavy double-rig saddle had replaced her lighter Spanish-rig on the glossy roan.

"Mary, I—I shouldn't do this. Your father—an' he sheriff, too—"

"He won't know—and if he did, what of it? Dad would try as hard to catch you as if you were anyone else, but if you did get away, he'd be glad of it."

"I won't forget it, Mary. Lord, but you're white!"

"Good-by, Dan."

He noticed that the little gloved hand trembled, but her face was still cool and emotionless. He took her hand; somehow his fingers would not let go of it for that brief moment.

Then he heard a wild, half-animal wail, and she was shivering against his chest, and her arms were around his neck.

"Dan, Dan—what made you do it?"

His arms were around her, and she clung to him frantically. Gone was her reserve, gone was her book-learning. The wild little girl he remembered always as riding bare-back down a mountain-side at breakneck speed was back again—and sobbing wildly against his chest. And he a murderer! He pushed her from him, and leaped into the saddle.

"Good-by, Mary."

"Dan—Dan—"

He glanced back and saw her standing there, those little gloved hands stretched after him beseechingly. She loved him—a murderer!

He swung around a little knoll, his mind working rapidly, though none too coherently. Where had he better head for? Perhaps the rough country over toward Tonto Basin would be the best. Then, riding at night, he might work his way down into Mexico. There were big cattle outfits

there, and many of them employed American foremen and straw-bosses. Perhaps he could get a job there, if he ever got to Mexico.

He would stand a fair chance, except he would have to show himself at some ranches or settlements to get food, and perhaps a change of horses. Very likely he would be given all he wanted without a murmur; then, the moment he was out of sight, telephone-lines would hum from one sheriff's office to the next. He would be surrounded.

He thought of Ernie Dalton, whom Sheriff Ellis was bringing back from Yavapai County—if Dalton was still alive. Even he, hard-boiled cut-throat that he was, had failed to

escape after robbing the bank and killing the cashier. That reward Charley Richards had offered for him had made his capture certain. A man with ten thousand on his head had little chance of escape. Would a reward be of-



"Mary, I—I shouldn't do this. Your father—"
"He won't know—and if he did, what of it?"

fered for him too? Perhaps Richards himself would offer one; Charley was vengeful—always had been. It was more this vindictive spirit than the killing of his cashier over in Stanton that had made him put up that reward. One had to learn that the Richards property was sacred! How about that big white Richards face, now so badly battered? Was it also sacred?

At that, Ernie Dalton had stood a very good chance to get away—he had been thought to be in Mexico, and the hunt almost abandoned. What fool kink in his brain had made him try to hold up a Prescott bank, so soon after the Stanton job? They said he had got a broken leg, a bullet through his chest and another through his abdomen before he reached the sidewalk outside.

But he *could* have got away—very easily. Why, then, could not Dan escape? Suddenly he jerked his horse to a standstill. Before his eyes danced a picture of a dusty, deserted street at midday, a small but solid-looking bank with a marble front. Hankins, the old cashier, would be bending over his books, peering in his near-sighted way. Every deputy was out of town, hunting him; so, probably, were most of the other men capable of fighting, if Charley had offered a reward.

A sudden, unexpected command. Hankins and the clerks would throw their hands in the air. Of course Charley might come striding out of his private office. Well, let him come! Damn him—he owed Dan the money, the blood-sucker. It was against the law, but it wasn't half as much a crime as the things Richards himself did every day! Why not do it? He was an outlaw anyway, a murderer. He would get enough to give him a fresh start far away.

He had to have a gun. What madness had made him drop his own back there in the alley? Well, he had another at the ranch—his old one. The deputies would not stay there long; they would be expecting him to go streaking out of the country as fast as his horse would carry him. He'd have to get another horse, too—not be seen riding Mary's. He could just turn the roan loose on the range and it would go home.

Let's see—he could wear some old clothes, and pull a bandanna over his face. They might not recognize him; but if they did, what of it? He would want Charley Richards to recognize him!

He was swinging back around the knoll, and soon his ranch came in view below him again. There they were, two miles from the ranch, just reaching the top of Nelson's Pass. So they figured he was heading for Tonto Basin. If he had started there, they might have intercepted him.

The ranch seemed deserted, but he took no chances. He hid his horse in the bushes some distance away, and walked, crouched over, up the bed of the long dry wash. That would bring him behind the barn, and it was only a few steps from there to the log cabin. He would get his gun and cartridges first thing, and then he would see about a horse. Brownie would be the one. He was not the swiftest, but he had endurance, and was fine for rough country.

DAN peered cautiously around the corner of the barn. Of course there was no one there: it would be the last place anyone would be likely to look for him. No, not quite! The bank would be the very last place! Something like a sickly grin came to his face. The bank was just where he'd be within two hours!

He slipped across to the house, and flung the door open. Everything was just as he had left it. The posse had probably just glanced in, and then hurried on.

He entered the low room, and suddenly his throat choked up. His home! He had been born and reared in that low log cabin; now he would never see it again!

There hung the long, old-fashioned six-shooter he had carried before he got the new one. There was dust on the shabby belt and holster, and the cartridges were showing green in spots. He'd have to clean them up, so that he could reload fast without fear of one sticking in an emergency.

He walked slowly across the room, his eyes straying from one worn article of furniture to another. There were his high-school books, preserved in a bookcase of his own making, with the few other volumes he possessed. Perhaps he should take one with him for a keepsake? His hand trembled as he pulled the gun from its holster. . . .

"I figured you'd come back for it, Dan."

He whirled. There in the bedroom doorway stood old Pat Nally, chief deputy. His gun was not even drawn.

LIKE a flash, Dan threw his six-shooter up, and started to press the trigger. But his finger froze, and the gun sagged limply to his side. He could not do it! Neither, he now knew, could he have held up the bank. He had muddled it—muddled everything!

"It wasn't loaded anyway, Dan; I took the cartridges out," came Pat's slow drawl.

Now other men were coming from the bedroom—three of them. Two little clicks, barely audible, and two bands of steel encircled Dan's wrists. Pat Nally turned to one of his men:

"Ed, go out an' signal the other boys to come back."

The deputy left the room, and three shots from his carbine rang out. Dan thought he heard the answer, three more shots, but it might have been an echo flung back from the cañon. Old Pat rolled a brown-paper cigarette slowly.

"Dan," he grunted, "I thought you'd know better than to sit up there on the ridge watchin' us with the sun flashin' on yore bridle-bits. We found yore gun right in the saloon door an' knew you'd come here for another when you thought we'd gone."

But Dan Carson did not answer. He was sitting in his rawhide-bottom chair, staring blankly at those strange things on his wrists. Caught. . . . Murder. But perhaps it was just as well. Later on it might have been bank-robbery, and perhaps another murder. . . . He jerked as though he had been shot when he heard old Pat's voice:

"Ed, ride back in the brush there an' see if you can find his horse an' saddle."

"No, no! I— He gave out on me a couple of miles away, an' I walked here to get another. He's not there! I—"

They would find Mary's roan! He must stop them!

"Take a look anyway, Ed," drawled old Pat.

"I tell you—"

Dan sprang to his feet, but was pushed back into the chair.

"Take it easy, Dan—no use gittin' excited."

A few minutes later Ed came slowly into the room, a queer look on his face.

"He was ridin' Mary Ellis' big roan!"

"He—" began Pat, and stopped. All four men were looking at Dan queerly.

"My God!" began Ed, "do you suppose he—"

But Pat shook his head gently, almost kindly.

"No, Ed. The kid aint *that* rotten. In fact he aint rotten at all—he's as white as they make 'em, but he never learned to keep his temper."

He nodded his head sagely a moment and continued:

"I kinda suspected about him an' Mary all the time. She *would* stick with him in a pinch—she's that kind. Want a smoke, Dan?"

(Please turn to page 135)



"These little scribbled designs on the back I'm not sure about."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

In "An Agreement in Code," Trevor's nerve, as well as wit, is tested against a leader as deadly as a cobra.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

CAPTAIN Reginald Ffrench of the Foreign Office, in his thirtieth year, was sufficiently popular in London society to be in evidence at almost any dinner-party, reception or dance. His morning post usually contained more invitations from titled or otherwise prominent hostesses than he possibly could accept, though he generally looked in at three or four social functions during an evening, when in town.

Just what his duties were at the F. O. nobody seemed to know, but they were assumed to be much the same as those of other *attachés* in the various Government departments. Knowing everybody as he did, it aroused no comment whatever if one came upon him in almost any part of his hostess' premises.

On this particular evening, at Lord Fermory's townhouse in Stanhope Square, Captain Reggie had strolled down the foyer-hall on the parlor floor to a small corridor leading off to His Lordship's library in the rear. Echoes of the music from the ballroom came noticeably above the massed undertones of conversation in every part of the first and second floors. People drifted across the foyer from drawing-room to parlor and the ballroom beyond, sometimes forming temporary groups in the hall, with several of the younger couples seated upon the steps of the winding stairway.

Nobody noticed Ffrench as he slipped down the side corridor; he had waited until people were looking in other directions. At the door of the library, he stopped, silently examining every corner of the room which for the moment was unoccupied. Hickory logs blazed on the andirons in the big fireplace. The windows had been closed to keep out the chilly black fog, and the curtains drawn before them to prevent anyone from looking in, though there was little chance of that with the fog blurring everything two feet away. Across one corner near His Lordship's desk, there was a long divan, and heavy but comfortable chairs were grouped about.

Ffrench eyed the long divan speculatively, then slightly shook his head. The space at the back was in shadow, but one or two men were likely to be seated upon it before the evening was over—men who had a strong investigating streak when there seemed to be occasion for it.

Presently he decided that if anyone started to pull aside the window-curtains and glance behind them, the material was heavy enough for concealment at one side. He slipped into the recess between them and the farther window, seating himself on the floor with his back against the casing, prepared for what might be a long wait.

In this, however, he was agreeably disappointed. Inside of fifteen minutes, Lord Fermory came in and sat down in the swivel-chair behind his desk. In a few minutes more three of his guests drifted in, one after the other, and seated themselves.

"Er—anybody likely to happen in here, Fermory?" asked one.

"Hardly a chance of it—but I'll just be locking the door to make sure that we're not interrupted or overheard," His Lordship observed.

"You wass positif t'ere wass nopody else in der room? *Nein?*" another man inquired.

"You might look over behind the divan you're sitting on, Bornovitch. I locked these windows myself, half an hour ago—but I'll make sure nobody has touched the fastenings. There's no other place that even a cat could hide in, here!"

Reaching between the curtains, he felt of the fastenings on each of the three windows and found them intact. Ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would have assumed that his hand or elbow must have touched anybody concealed in the embrasure; and in fact, at the end window, His Lordship's knee was within six inches of the Captain's shoulder—but he never thought of pulling the curtains wide apart and making a more thorough examination. There certainly had been nobody there half an hour before when he had fastened the windows, and it didn't occur to him that anyone might have slipped in during the few minutes he was out of the room.

This done, he returned to his chair.

"Well, gentlemen, I assume that one of you has fetched along the agreem'nt? We are slowly building up an organization here in England which may surprise you when the numbers and facilities are understood, but we make no concerted move until we know exactly what we may count upon in other European States. It would be suicide

if we did. Of course I thoroughly understand that carrying a document like that around the London streets is much like having dynamite in one's pocket. I've an up-to-date safe concealed in this room where I fancy the agreement will be secure until I can place it in a safe-deposit box in the morning."

"Well, dot shouldt pe a goodt itea—if we decide mit ourselves t'at der document shouldt pe handted ofer mit Your Lordtship," one of his listeners assented reluctantly. "Of course you understandt t'at it iss in code from beginnings to endt. But it iss in der 'B' Code, w'ich I wass toldt Your Lordtship hass de key for. Yess?"

"Oh, aye—in another part of the house. Mustn't attract attention by goin' after it just now. You might run over the main points, Devereaux, so that I get the general idea. May be some of 'em that'll need threshin' out between us, y'know."

"Why, I fancy we're pretty much in accord. Still, no harm in summin' up. Italy is supposed to be so thoroughly under Fascist control that there is no socialist strength at all. As a matter of fact, Moscow has been workin'—payin' out millions underground—until we could put a good fifty per cent more men in the field than *Il Duce*, tomorrow, if occasion arose. In Spain, of course, we're strong enough to overthrow the Governm't any time we feel like it—strong enough to let the popular Alfonso alone where he is. When we move, he will have no choice about consenting to our demands. In France, we can smash any Cabinet they try to form without us and have perfected alliances with other blocs until I fancy we could elect a Governm't of our own. And after yesterday's elections in Germany, we're stronger than ever before. With certain concessions to Moscow, we can have the active backing of every Russian and member of the *Internationale* in the German Republic. In the Balkans, we are stronger than anyone supposes. Very good!

"Now, this agreem'nt we've fetched along for your organization in the United Kingdom to sign gives the number of men we can depend upon in each State, the amount of available financial backing, including the share apportioned to you, names of leaders in each country who are supposed to be affiliated with other parties but who are our own sworn members. Naturally, there is no explanation or comment of any sort made with that list of names.

"If it is found upon one of us, in case of arrest, there is no evidence whatever that the individuals have anything to do with us. We might have copied off such a list from any 'Who's Who' with merely the intention of circularizin' 'em with propaganda through the mails. But our verbal assurance goes with the agreem'nt. Those men are sworn to us—it would cost them their lives to back out. Here's the agreem'nt, in the 'B' Code, as Bornovitch has just told you."

"VERY good, Devereaux," said Fermory. "I'll just clip it into this drawer until we've finished our interview and then put it in my safe. I make it a point never to open that safe until I'm alone in the room with that door locked. There isn't a soul besides myself who even knows that there is such a thing here, except the experts from the New York manufacturers who came over here to install it. You need be under no apprehension. I'll be responsible for the docum'nt."

"Quite a few well-known men would die, Fermory, if what's in it were ever made public! An'—really, you know—I rather fancy you'd head the list. What? Y'see, your responsibility wouldn't mean a thing to us if that data leaked out! However, we'll leave it here with you an' hear you lock the door before we join the other guests.

Next Thursday, we'll arrange to meet you here or elsewhere an' hear what your organization decides about signin'. You'll not show the agreem'nt to more than half a dozen of your leaders—more would be a needless risk. An' it's plainly understood that no decodin' is to be written out!"

When Fermory had locked the door after them, he stepped quickly back to a section of the book-shelving which lined the walls, removed a dozen books, reached in, slid aside one of the oak strips which formed the wainscoting against the wall, and pulled a small lever in the recess. Then that section of the shelving swung outward, revealing one of the regulation panels in the wainscoting. A concealed spring swung this panel also outward. Behind it was a three-foot circular door of a modern safe.

When this hidden safe was opened, His Lordship made no move toward placing the code-agreement inside. Instead, he took from one of the small drawers several sheets of typed memoranda with lists of names. Going over to the big fireplace, he reached one arm up the chimney-flue. As he pulled down another lever, one square of the parquet oak flooring near the fireplace slid back under the baseboard, revealing what appeared to be a foundation of thick oak planking. When this also was pushed back, a small lid in the center of a larger steel box appeared, with a combination-knob sunk flush in it.

Turning this to a four-figure combination, he lifted the lid, then placed both the sheets of memoranda and the code-agreement inside. As Lord Fermory closed the lid and shoved back the parquet square in the floor until it would have taken almost microscopic examination to detect any joints in the woodwork, Captain Ffrench came silently out from the window embrasure behind him.

FFRENCH knew from his years in the Secret Service that he was in an extremely ticklish position. Fermory himself he considered negligible as a source of danger. But he had been watching the faces of the three revolutionists during the discussion of what the agreement covered—particularly, that of the smaller man, Smith, who had not spoken—and saw that not one of them really trusted His Lordship.

They had no doubts as to his socialist beliefs,—his Party affiliations and his speeches in the House were sufficient guarantees upon that point,—but they were by no means sure that he would go to the length of participating in more or less bloody revolution or bring his secret organization into anything of the sort, and they ridiculed any such possibility as a peaceful revolution. On that chance, came the question as to what he *would* do, if he didn't go all the way?

It was conceivable that he might visualize another European war and try to forestall it by prompt publication of what he knew concerning their strength in the other nations. On the whole, the Captain was convinced that those three men were at that moment figuring out some way of getting back into that library unobserved, or at least finding some opening through which they might see what was going on in there and where His Lordship's safe was located. So that he was in some such position as a rat in a trap, his best chance being in remaining concealed where he was—which he had no notion at all of doing!

As a precaution, however, in case of eventualities, the Captain drew one of his visiting-cards from its case. He scribbled across the top of it, and then made a few apparently meaningless pencil diagrams on the back, much as a man does on a pad in a telephone-booth.

The front now read:

*Introducing the Rt. Hon. The
Marquess of Lyonesse*

CAPT. REGINALD FFRENCH

ST. JAMES'S CLUB

While on the back appeared this marking:



Seemingly, the explanation was obvious; hardly anybody would have considered any other meaning possible. Presumably he had wished to illustrate some puzzle to a friend and had used the back of one of his cards, absent-mindedly putting it back into the case. Subsequently, intending to give the Marquess an introduction to somebody, he had, without glancing at the back, used this particular card, meaning to hand it to the Marquess later.

Ffrench had silently reached a point three feet behind His Lordship, who was starting to close the safe door, when Fermory turned around. He instantly shoved one hand into his hip pocket.

But before His Lordship could get the automatic out, the Captain's fist came up in a vicious blow which landed fairly upon the point of the other man's chin.

Fermory's legs began to buckle. He staggered, then fell backward, full length, upon the thick Chinese rug. Paying no attention to the safe, the Captain, facing directly toward the windows as it happened, was just stepping over to the fireplace in order to pull the lever and reopen the square of flooring when he heard a faint *plop* from the direction of the window-curtains.

A streak of fire seemed to go through his head. With a rather vague smile of realization as to what had happened, he went out into the Eternal Shadow as he pitched forward upon the floor.

Smith, the smallest of the three revolutionists, stepped out from behind the curtains and cat-footed over to the door to satisfy himself that it was still securely locked. In his hand was a .32-caliber automatic. He never used a heavier one, claiming that if one knew how to shoot, a "long .32" cartridge was quite sufficient and much less messy.

As the assassin came back to where the two men were lying on the floor, Devereaux and Bornovitch came in through the window and joined him. It was quite evident that when it came to cases the most silent and insignificant member of the party was the brains behind it.

It had been he who stopped them from attempting to turn the key back in the lock with a pair of nippers when they left His Lordship in the room and led them, with an evident knowledge of house architecture, through rear passages until they emerged in the little rear court, where they climbed a small penthouse and managed to force a window without attracting attention.

"This chap killed Fermory just as he got the safe open, I fancy? Eh, Smith?"

"Looks more as if he merely knocked him out. Fermory's breathing—heavily but naturally. He'll be conscious in a few minutes."

"Best be sure this other chap didn't get the agreement, hadn't we?"

"Aye. Bornovitch can go through him while you examine everything in the safe. May be something there that will give us a hold on His Lordship. Don't waste any time! We must be out of here before any one else tries to get in and becomes suspicious. Don't want Fermory to know we have gone through his safe, either!"

For a matter of ten minutes they worked silently but thoroughly. They found papers in the safe revealing unpleasant sidelights upon Fermory, but nothing which might give them any real hold over him. Nor did they find any trace of the coded agreement, though they searched the entire room and felt behind the books. Under the edge of the divan, a visiting-card was lying with something penciled over the name. But it was so unquestionably nothing but a visiting-card that they didn't even pick it up for a look.

Then Fermory groaned, managed to sit up on the floor and look at them with an expression of stupefaction. In a moment or two, he struggled up on his feet and leaned against the desk.

"What happened?" he asked. "Who opened my safe? Who's that chap on the floor? How did you three get in here?"

"Through the window from the rear court, just after this stiff knocked you out. Who is he? How did you manage to kill him?"

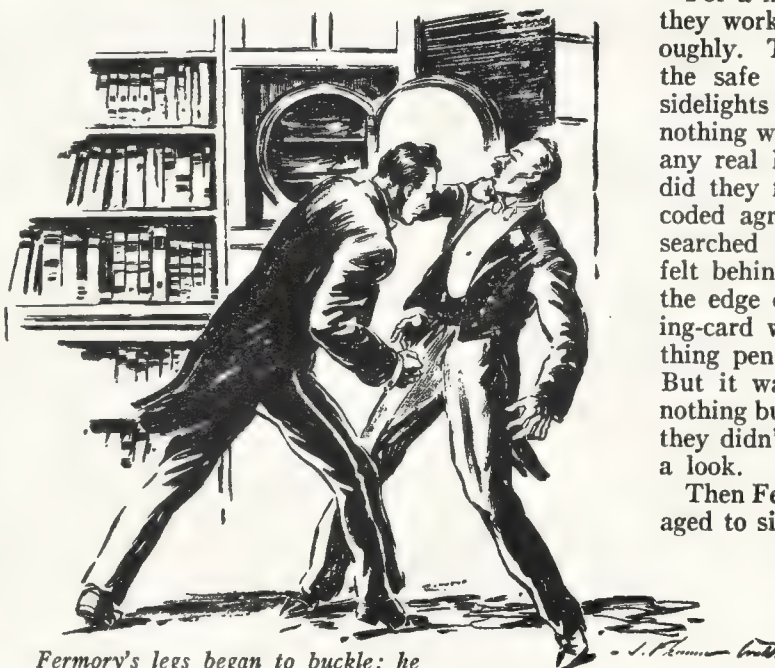
Bornovitch turned the Captain's body over so that Fermory could look down into the still smiling face and see the little red hole in the exact center of the forehead.

"My God! Captain Reggie Ffrench! He's an *attaché* in one of the Government departments—blessed if I remember which! Why—why—I never touched him! My gun's in my pocket—hasn't been fired! Last thing I knew, there was some one just behind my shoulder. Before I could get at my gun he must have knocked me out! But—but—how did he know the way to open my safe?"

"Prob'ly didn't. You must have just opened it yourself when he hit you. Where's the agreement?"

"Why—why—must be in the drawer of my desk where you saw me put it! I'm quite sure I'd not put it in the safe! Positive, in fact!"

"We've searched the room, the safe, the desk, the Captain's body. There's no trace of the agreement, anywhere."



Fermory's legs began to buckle; he staggered, then fell backward.

"But, dammit all, that docum'nt hasn't wings, you know! If you came in through one of those windows you must have seen anyone else trying to escape from this room that way! Apparently the only other person besides us four who has been in this room since you left it was Captain Ffrench, there. What business he had here, how the devil he got in, or why he should knock me out—if he really did—I simply can't imagine! That agreem'nt has simply got to be in this room—*somewhere!*"

"Well—that's the conclusion we'd reached, too! Where is it, Fermory? This dead man hasn't got it. There's been no time for anyone else to get in here. The windows and that door are the only ways they could have come or gone. Seems to be up to you. Where is it?"

"My God! If you've not found it with all your searchin', I'm blessed if I can even imagine!"

"Sometimes, when a man's been knocked out, he forgets entirely what he was doing just before. You must have opened that safe. Yet you were willing to swear that you'd not done so. Isn't there some other place of concealment about this room where you might have put that agreem'nt—an' then forgotten all about it when the Captain hit you? Think, man, think!"

Fermory was thinking. It came to him that he *had* done just what he'd meant to do all the time—put the agreement in the steel box under the floor—but in no circumstances would he have given them the slightest hint that there was such a place. There were papers in that box with which he was taking no chances. It was simply out of the question that he should even admit the existence of such a place—and there you were!

"Good Lord, man! Don't you suppose I know my own library? My safe, which you can see for yourselves, was pretty well concealed. If it's not in this room, Ffrench must have burned it in the fireplace before he was shot, though I can't imagine him doin' anything of the sort. Can't see any object—he couldn't read the thing!"

"No, burning it is the last thing Ffrench would do—particularly if he happens to be connected with the British Foreign Office, as I more than half suspect. In that case, it begins to look like a frame-up between you two for the purpose of getting that agreem'nt from us, with all its data an' the list of our leaders. Quite possible you weren't as completely knocked out as you seemed. Got your stage all set for one of the guests or a servant to find you here with your safe open, papers scattered about, unconscious and unable to say what happened.

"Of course Ffrench didn't expect to be killed. That was throwing a spanner into the works and spoiling the combination altogether. Look here, Fermory, don't you realize what you're up against? At the moment, all we wish to know is that the agreem'nt is still in your possession. An' you know whether it is or not—no blinkin' fear!

"When you satisfy us on that point, we'll decide whether we care about the risk of leavin' it with you or not. We aren't jokin', you know! You've had all the warning you need as to what happens when we've reason to believe that we can't trust a certain man or woman. Once more, now, an' this is final: where's that paper?"

"Upon my soul I can't imagine, Smith. I know no more about it than you do!"

"Oh, very good, if you *will* have it! Nobody but yourself to blame, you know. We're taking no chances. That's all. Er—fancy we'd best go out by the door, Bornovitch, an' leave it unlocked, so that some one will find 'em before long. Leave that window open by way of a 'red herring,' I fancy. What?"

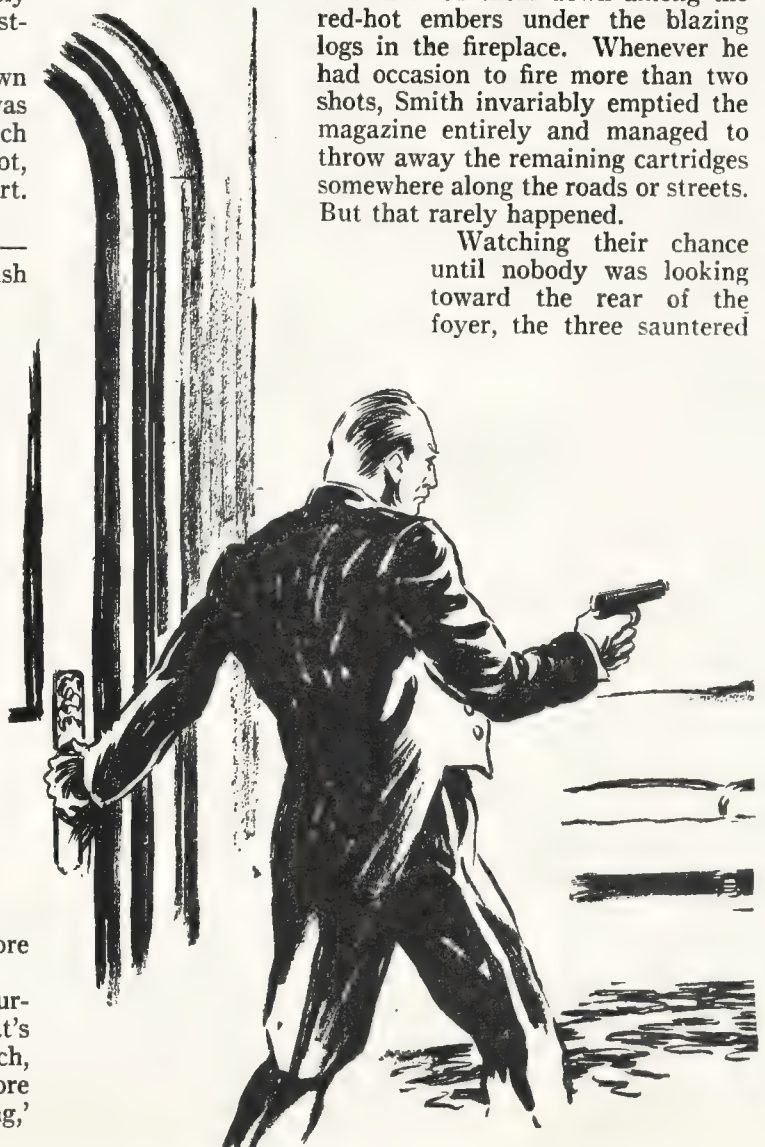
His Lordship was leaning against the front of his desk, facing the hall door. He could feel cold perspiration trickling down his spine. He simply couldn't believe what their actions and remarks implied. . . . Fortunately it was over about as soon as full realization came to him. With brief nods of farewell, the three men went across to the door in a leisurely manner, unlocked it, and two of them went out.

Smith was the last. Pulling the door almost closed for a second to deaden the sound, his arm swung up. There was a dull cough, a lance of orange-colored flame. Then he softly closed the door. Fermory crumpled down, a red spot in the exact center of his forehead, another much larger, at the back of his skull. A .32 bullet was embedded in the oak of the chimney mantel. The distance from desk to door was approximately thirty feet. Rather phenomenal shooting, all things considered.

In the little corridor leading to the foyer-hall, Smith slipped out the magazine from the butt of his pistol, took from his waistcoat pocket the two spare cartridges he always carried there, and snapped them into the magazine. From another pocket he took sheets of tissue paper, wrapped them around a pencil, and swabbed out the inside of the pistol barrel. Lighting a cigarette with one of the patent American appliances, he then held the flame to the tissue paper until it was entirely consumed.

Before leaving the library, he went back and picked up the empty shells which had snapped out upon the floor and rammed them down among the red-hot embers under the blazing logs in the fireplace. Whenever he had occasion to fire more than two shots, Smith invariably emptied the magazine entirely and managed to throw away the remaining cartridges somewhere along the roads or streets. But that rarely happened.

Watching their chance until nobody was looking toward the rear of the foyer, the three sauntered



out and mingled with the crowd of other guests, nobody noticing from which direction they had come. One or another of them had been seen chatting with His Lordship during the evening, but that was all anyone remembered about them.

In less than five minutes after leaving the library, they were shaking hands with Her Ladyship at the ballroom door, expressing themselves as having had a most enjoyable evening—taking their leave not as a group but as single individuals. In the street, they sauntered along until they met at a deserted corner in the Kensington neighborhood and stopped for a conference.

"That agreem't wasn't on Fermory himself. We searched him before he came around," Smith remarked, puzzled.

"Did you see the Captain hit him, Smith?" Devereaux asked.

"Not—quite; but I did hear him stumble and fall. It wasn't a frame-up between them unless they suspected we were around somewhere and decided to make it realistic. On the whole, I think not. The Captain turned as soon as he saw that Fermory was 'out,' and seemed to be going toward the safe.

"I naturally supposed the agreem't had been already placed in it—couldn't take any chances of having him go through the thing or know that either of us three were int'rested in it. In fact, what decided me was the probability that he had been hidden in the room while we were talking; couldn't see how he got there any other way. And of course that settled it. He had to go, right then and there."

"Where would you say the agreem't is?"

"Some hidden compartm't in that room. The very trouble Fermory went to in keepin' the location of that safe from being known favors the assumption that he must have had one or two other places for concealment of anything valuable in emergencies. Looked to me as though he must have had some pretty dangerous stuff wherever he did put the agreem't, and didn't dare risk opening it up even to save

his life, though he'd no idea we'd actually kill him. I saw that in his face as I fired—he didn't know what was coming until the last few seconds. There's no chance that anyone else knows about the place he put it. The paper will stay there until the house is pulled down, unless we manage to get it first."

It was Sniffin, the butler, who discovered the bodies when he went in with a tray of whisky and soda at midnight, as was his regular custom. Although he was nearing fifty, Sniffin had gone through the World War, and was a top-sergeant when demobilized. He was a bit paunchy from the years of soft living since, but there was no question with him of getting rattled by what he saw.

Quietly placing the tray on its usual corner of the desk, he looked at the two bodies closely enough for identification, but didn't touch them. For a moment or so, he stood thinking. It wasn't the sort of thing to tell Her Ladyship without more or less preparation, or the Honorable Patricia, either. And the Honorable Seumas was in India with his regiment.

Faces in the drawing-room and parlor, as Sniffin had passed the doors a few minutes before, flashed through his mind. Two of them stood out as being about the sort he wanted—men of vast affairs with much organizing ability and the habit of command—the Marquess of Lyonesse and Earl Lammerford of St. Ives. If he could but quietly get a word with them, now. They were your chaps who'd know what was best to do, at once—no shilly-shallying. They would begin handling the situation before you could say "knife!"

Sniffin closed the door and locked it, putting the key in his pocket. Then he quietly eased himself through the crowd of standing and sitting guests until he stood behind Earl Lammerford's chair. He whispered:

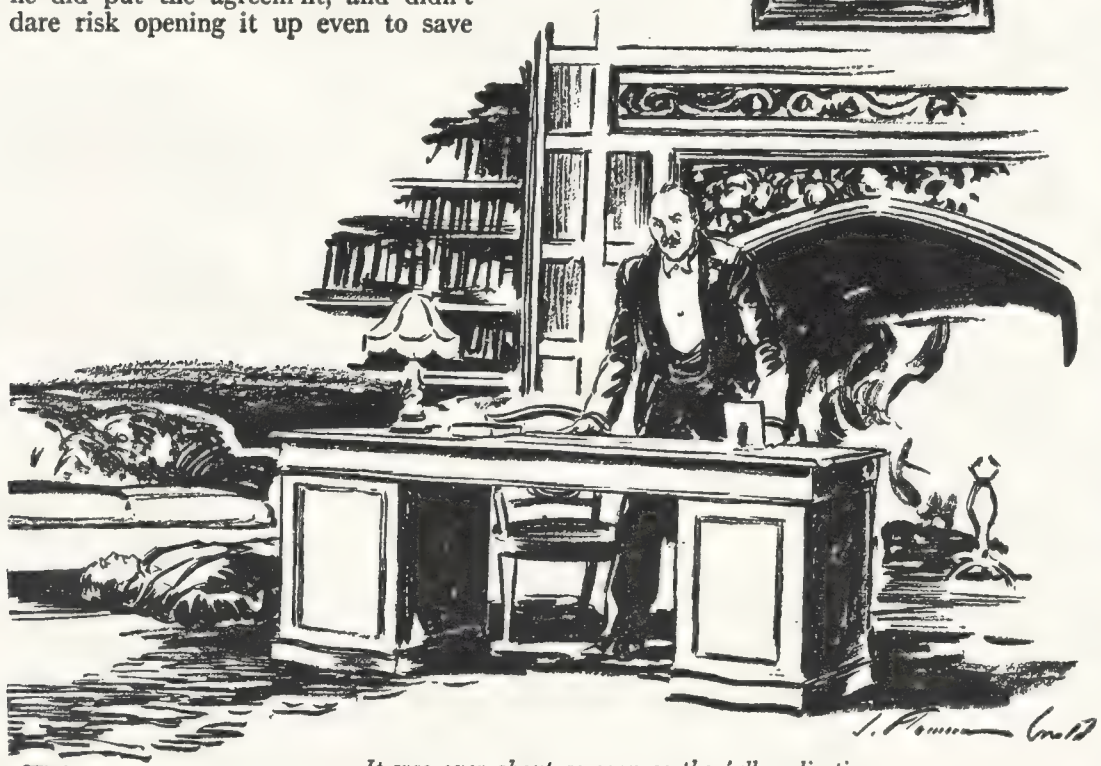
"Beg pardon, M'Lud, but could h'I 'ave a word with you and M' Lud Marquess in private? Something a bit serious, in a manner of speakin', sir."

The Earl glanced up into a deferential face as expressionless as that of a wooden Indian—but with a hint of real trouble in the deep-set eyes—and carelessly nodded. Then he caught Trevor's eye, across the ladies between them, and again slightly nodded toward the disappearing butler.

"Please excuse us a few moments, ladies; telephone," he said casually.

Strolling leisurely through the foyer, they turned down the side corridor as if going back for a chat with Fermory.

As Sniffin opened the door, shooting the bolt when they were inside, they stood glancing about the room—noting the position of the two bodies, every bit of furniture, every log on the andirons, every fold of the window curtains, every scrap of



It was over about as soon as the full realization came to him Smith's arm swung up—there was a dull cough, a lance of flame

paper on the floor and upon the shelves of the open safe. After perhaps a minute, the Marquess quietly said:

"Sniffin, in due time this is a matter for Scotland Yard. But Captain Ffrench was a Foreign Office man, apparently here this evening more on duty for the Secret Service than as merely a guest. Whoever he was after seems to have got him just as he caught them in the act, and Fermory too, as he came in. I fancy they got away through one of those windows.

"First thing to do is fetch Major Broadhurst an' Leftenant Snaith, both F. O. men, who are among the guests somewhere. Just say we'd like to see 'em in here. Meanwhile, I'll get through to Downing Street on this telephone an' have the F. O. medico around here at once. You'll be on the lookout an' fetch him to us when he comes."

In fifteen minutes two Foreign Office men and the doctor were in the library with the door locked, Sniffin having been posted just outside in the corridor in readiness for any sort of orders. Before the doctor's arrival, the other four had searched the room and everything in it, microscopically. It was Leftenant Snaith who picked up the card from under the edge of the divan and handed it to the Marquess.

"Fancy you'll recall something about this, sir. Poor Ffrench was evidently intending to hand it to you."

TREVOR read the penciled inscription and saw at a glance that it must be some sort of "message from a vanished hand." He turned it over and glanced carelessly at the penciling on the back. Years of adventure in a school of deadly risk frequently imminent had given all of the Free Lances the type of poker-face which is worth millions and frequently a life-insurance policy as well. Carelessly glancing at both sides of the card again, he smiled, rather sadly. Reggie Ffrench had been one of his favorites among the younger men—one whom he had thought would make a brilliant record. Then he said:

"If Reggie was often as careless as that in drawing 'telephone-pad pictures' on the backs of his visiting-cards, I fancy some of the women must have given him 'what-for' concerning his slovenly habits. Hmph! There was some foreign acquaintance of his whom I fancied might have a bit of information—a Belgian Count, stickler for the formalities an' all that. Not at all the sort one goes up to an' says: 'Hello, Bill! Have a drink!' By the way, Snaith, any idea what Reggie was after in this house?"

"Not the balmiest!" Snaith replied. "The Major an' I both knew he was playin' some 'hunch' concernin' a supposed big communistic organization. But I can't see how anything of that sort could have anything to do with Fermory—one of the leaders in the House—or anything Fermory might be keeping in his safe! Unless, of course, he had obtained a lot of secret memoranda, which he meant to use in Parliam'nt, an' two or three communist bounders were after it in here. Ffrench might have got wind of that—an' been layin' doggo for 'em when they came in. Fermory hears the shot, comes a-runnin'—an' gets his as well.

"My word! I hope I never run up against a chap who shoots like that! There isn't an eighth of an inch difference in the position of the two bullet-holes. An' the shots must have been fired twenty or thirty feet away because there isn't a single powder-burn on faces or clothing. The holes are too clean-cut for near-by shooting."

"Well," said Trevor, "from the look of the papers an' drawers in that safe, the bounders must have feared the shots would fetch somebody in here an' surprise 'em red-handed. So they hooked it, prob'ly without getting what they came after—in fact, I'll wager they didn't!

"Which means that sooner or later, in their own good

time, at what they consider a favorable moment after the excitement over these two murders dies down, they'll come back for it—as surely as the sun shines. Stuff must be rather deadly incriminatin' if they're willin' to kill anybody who interferes with 'em! So, I'm askin' the F. O. for a detail of at least two first-class men watching this library from inside and from that little rear court—all day an' all night!

"Saunderson won't order it. He gets too much heckling from his own Labor Party as it is. But you chaps of the old régime know damned well the vital importance of not letting those scoundrels get whatever there is here. So I'm countin' upon your assistance, under the rose. Confidentially, I'll say to you that neither Lammerford nor I will let up on this game until we get hold of whatever Reggie Ffrench gave his life to get! Understood?"

"Faith, we've our own reasons for lookin' into this, Marquess! Reggie was one of us, d'ye see! If the Secretary can't see his way to orderin' a detail for this house, I fancy that four or five of us can get a month's leave. Nobody's business how we spend it! What gets me is the apparent lack of clues in this room. Doctor Moberly says Dick Evans, who's by way of bein' our best fingerprint man in London at the moment, will be down here with his powders, camera an' magnifyin'-glass as soon as he can pick 'em up at his diggin's—any minute, now."

"H-m-m. Look about the place for two empty shells, Snaith. Poke among the embers of that fire; copper an' brass don't melt very fast with ord'n'ry ember-heat. Meanwhile, I'll have another look-see. Judgin' by Fermory's position on the floor, he was standing, leaning against the desk, when he was shot—then he pitched forward. Consequently the shot must have come from the direction of the door. That would seem to imply that the murderer went out that way instead of by the window as we've been takin' for granted.

"If that was really what happened, he must have been one of the servants or guests. A servant wouldn't come into this room while Fermory was in it unless he rang for him—which implies a guest; possibly two guests—or even three. Once they're back among the rest, there's no indication that they were in here unless they were noticed goin' in or out—an' they'd guard against that. Fancy we'll make a point of lookin' over Her Ladyship's list.

"H-m-m—bullet went clean through Fermory's head? Now, a line from the door, across the top of this desk, would hit that black-oak mantel. Pretty hard stuff—force of bullet a good deal spent by that time, eh?"

The Marquess stepped around the desk and closely examined the mantel. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Here it is! Just flush with the outside of the wood! Fancy I'm going to spoil this mantel, but we need that bullet."

WHILE the Marquess was cutting around the bullet with his specially made pocket-knife—a tool of many sorts and the finest steel—Leftenant Snaith was scraping out the embers from under the still burning logs and spreading them over the hearthstones. The two empty shells had blackened and softened to some extent, but had not lost their shape. As the Marquess finally extracted the bullet, Snaith held out the shells on a fire-shovel.

"Don't fancy I've ever used or seen a cartridge of exactly that size, sir! Long thirty-twos, aren't they? The old six-chambered Webleys were made for long thirty-eights or forty-fives—but I never saw any of as small caliber as these before!"

"Hmph!" Trevor looked at them. "You notice, of course, that they were used in an automatic—not in a revolver? An' the automatics aren't made for long cartridges, unless to order. This bullet has scratches on its

sides indicating that it touched the webbing of a silencer, as it went out. I'd almost wager that there isn't another long thirty-two automatic, with a screw-thread on the muzzle for a silencer in the whole of London at this moment! Prob'ly made to order for some man who is a crack shot and finds that type of shell exactly suited to his hand. Made in the States, I'd say. Of course, he's taking a chance in packing a gun like that around with him because, if he just happens to be arrested anywhere in England an' it is found on him, that pins these two murders so fast on his neck that there's no possible alibi. But he seems to be the sort of man who'd have a pistol license, and carry the firearm under his arm where it doesn't bulge his clothes.

"Everything about this case—Reggie's suspicions an' all—indicates a criminal of super-intelligence—more dangerous than a cobra in the drain-pipe of one's bathroom.

"Well, when Captain Evans gets all the fingerprints (fancy that'll be him just comin' along the hall), there's no further reason for holdin'-off on the Yard, I take it? I'll break this to Her Ladyship an' see how soon we can get rid of the guests. Then we'll get Sir James Baldwin here with one of his inspectors."

QUIETLY going back among the guests, the Marquess found Lady Fermory and the Honorable Patricia standing in the doorway of the ballroom, where the crowd was now beginning to thin out a bit.

"How late do your affairs usually last, Lady Mary?"

"Oh, there are some of the young people dancing until after three as a rule, and some of the men knocking the balls about and having a spot of whisky in the billiard-room until two, at least."

"H-m-m, something serious has just occurred, Mary—nothing that any of your guests know about, of course; but it can be handled a lot better when the last one of 'em is out of the house. Any way occur to you for easin' 'em out without stirrin' up any comment? Let Sniffin drop a hint in the billiard-room that you're not fit at all, have been obliged to go to your room. Eh?"

"Why, yes, Marquess, I fancy that should get all of them out within half an hour! But what's the trouble—how serious?"

"That'll keep until we get rid of the guests. The Marchioness and Lammerford will stay here to help you out. He's in the library with Fermory, now. I'll send him out here."

It was the Marchioness—Countess Nan of Dyvnaint in her own right—who broke the news to Lady Mary and her daughter as the last guest left the house. She knew that her hostess scarcely had tolerated Lord Fermory for the last half-dozen years, for some reason not clearly understood, but supposed to be connected with his political career in the House—so she was not surprised when neither Pat nor her mother gave any indication of going to pieces when they heard the news.

"I've thought for some time that Father had no real patriotism in him, judging by what he's said in the House," Patricia said gravely. "And I'm not much surprised at his being shot. He's had interviews here with some pretty scaly foreigners—Germans, Russians, Hungarians—aside from radical Laborites of our own who seem to be out for what I'd call Red revolution. Father used to be a decent man when I was a flapper—in fact, rather brilliant in public life—but recently he's been drifting along with a pretty bad lot; very few of his social acquaintances even dream how bad."

At that moment Superintendent Sir James Baldwin and Chief Inspector Blount of Scotland Yard arrived. They were taken at once into the library, where Major Broad-

hurst and Doctor Moberly explained the fact of its being primarily a Foreign Office case, as their reason for not calling in the Yard at once.

HE assured Sir James that in their preliminary examination for the Government, the bodies had not been disturbed in the least. The papers in the safe had been examined but had been replaced exactly as they were. Fingerprints had been photographed on the doorknobs, windowpanes and casing, woodwork of the desk, mantel and book-shelving, the divan and chairs. Duplicate prints of these would be sent to the Yard by messenger as soon as obtained. No weapons had been discovered except those in the pockets of the dead men. Then the Marquess handed Blount the two empty shells and the bullet, explaining how and where they had been found. . . .

It was daylight when the Trevors and Lammerford left Stanhope Square, driving around to the famous Park Lane mansion for an early breakfast. Achmet, the Trevors' Afghan chauffeur and household executive, went back through the gardens to the house of his cousin, Prince Abdool of Afridistan, on Park Street, with a report of what had happened during the night, and Abdool joined the others as soon as the meal was ready. After giving him a brief résumé of the facts, the Marquess said:

"We've known, of course, that the socialist and communist blocs in all of the European States were constantly being organized an' reorganized—sometimes assuming dangerous proportions, and then quarreling among themselves, disintegrating to some extent, getting together again in formidable numbers. The United Kingdom always has been their chief stumbling-block. We've among us about as crazy radicals as you'll find anywhere outside of asylums—but so far they've drawn the line at 'gutters running with blood.' What the outside communists are determined to bring about is a revolution that is unanimous—destructive of all civilized governm't an' the 'white-collar class' in general.

"So far, the 'white-collar' chaps remain on top because they're far-sighted enough to discount in advance the moves of the other lot. But if we permit ourselves to be lulled into a feeling of security, we're quite likely to be eliminated in various unpleasant ways.

"And one of the most insidious dangers we have to contend with is the type of traitor-Briton like Lord Fermory—knifing us in the back when we consider him, by every element of birth, breeding, social position, one of ourselves, thinking as we do, approving of responsible, representative governm't. After Patricia's remarks when we broke the news of her father's death to her, I'm convinced that Reggie knew Fermory for a rotten traitor—learned that he was to have a conference with Red agents last night—prob'ly obtaining from them some dangerous docum'nts—an' determined to overhear that conference.

"It's a safe bet that he did overhear it, an' subsequ'ntly attempted to get the docum'nts. Ffrench never lost sight of the main point at stake for one second! Hidden somewhere in that room, he knew his chances of getting out weren't so good. So he figured ahead, scribbled on one of his visiting-cards—must have been holding it loosely in his left hand when he was shot.

"It flew over as far as the divan, and lay on the floor under its edge. Looked like exactly what it was—just a visiting-card—too small to be in any way important. Nobody even picked it up until Lammy, Broadhurst an' Snaith searched the room.

"Snaith handed it to me as merely a card of introduction which Reggie had meant to give me sometime that evening—never dreamed of its being anything more than that. Yet this last message of a brave man facing almost

certain death—which he had fairly good reason to suppose might be handed to me by some one, just as it was by Snaith—tells us half or three-quarters of what we need to know. I'll pass it around the table. What do you make of it, Lammy?"

"H-m-m! The introduction part of it was obviously intended merely to get it into your hands in a perfectly open an' unsuspecting way. I'd say there's no question as to that. But these little scribbled designs on the back I'm not so sure about. They easily might have been made to illustrate some point with another person at an entirely different time when he had no scrap of paper to use, and then the card shoved back into the case again without erasing the marks."

"Precisely the impression Reggie expected an' hoped to give!" the Marquess said. "Not one person in a thousand would deduce anything else. But every one of us at this table knows better than that. Why should a card of introduction happen to be in his hand when he expected to be fighting for his life in a few seconds—flip out across the floor when the closed case was still in his waistcoat pocket? —What do *you* say, Abdool?"

"I think these two objects on the lower right corner were intended to represent books—unmistakably books, I fancy; which to me would indicate some place where there was more than one book—a library, for example. That's prob'ly what he meant—the libr'y where he was shot, I'd say. But I don't understand the letter 'F' or its application to the books. Couldn't mean 'French,' could it? As for the two rectangles, they might mean a thousand things."

"I'm rather surprised that Lammy didn't get that. It was one of the symbols in occasional use by the F. O. some years ago. —Nan, what do you make of it?"

"Oh, I got the whole story after a second glance at the card. In the old days when Lammy was Dean of the King's Messengers, I made an exhaustive study of all the symbols used by the F. O. during the last eighty or hundred years, and frequently used some of them myself. Two years ago, I suggested to Reggie French that he would find them useful—coached him until he had the lot and the F. O. system of shorthand as well."

"The outside rectangle indicates a box or any sort of more or less square receptacle—as in this case, a space which is concealed somewhere in a room or building. The rectangle inside of it means a box—presumably steel, with a secure lock—which is kept inside of that secret cubby-hole. The books indicate that library, as Abdool guessed. If the cubby-hole had been a barrel, cask or tub, the outlines would have been circular."

"The letter 'F' doesn't mean 'French'—poor Reggie had no time to waste upon a single pencil-mark which wasn't rudimentary and vitally important, in the few seconds he was preparing this card. He'd given you pretty complete directions that something we ought to get before anyone else was concealed in that room in some hidden cubby-hole. But what part of that room? He knew we'd have no time to waste when we went after it. Location was vitally essential. There were but three possible locations—ceiling, walls, and—"

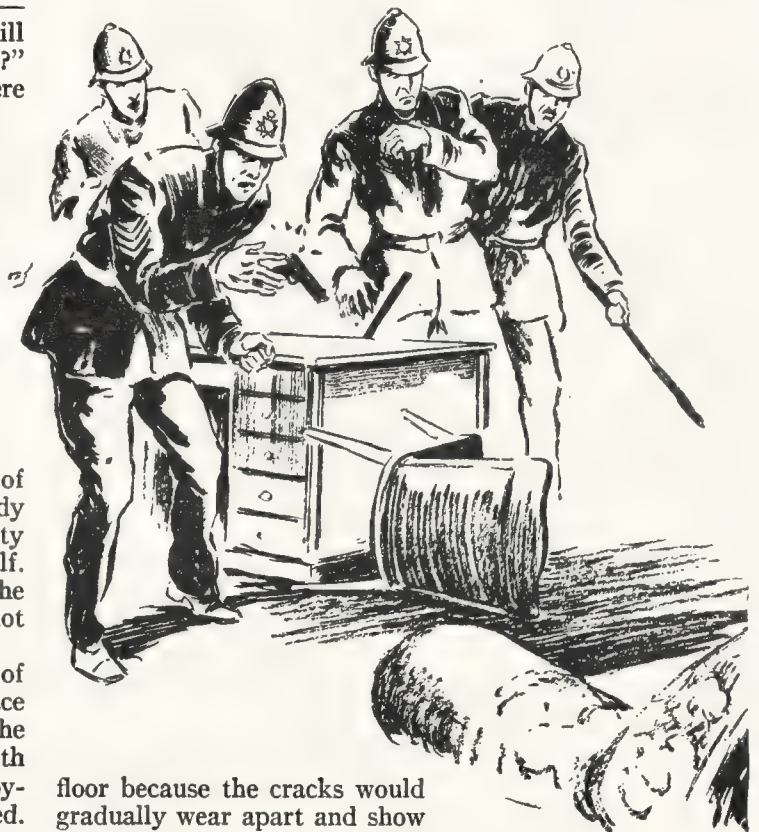
"*Floor*, by Jove! But why on the book instead of the rectangles?"

"So that it wouldn't too obviously refer to them. Lammy and Abdool both thought it applied to the book and tried to make it fit that."

"My word! You've got it, Nan! Dead right all through! D'ye know—as penance for my sins an' laziness I'm going to brush up on all this stuff I used to know when I was a King's Messenger! Let's see, now—Reggie

must have been hidden in that room during a conference with those bounders. If not, he was hidden there when Fermory came in an' opened the safe. Fermory evidently has some dangerous docum'ts in it—fancies the other cubby-hole will be a more secure place to keep 'em because nobody's likely to dig up the whole floor. He opens the safe, gets the stuff, puts it in the other place an' closes that. Reggie now knows how to get into that, but hasn't the safe-combination—fancies he'd best come out while he has a chance at both.

"After that—well, we don't know. . . . His murderers evidently knew nothing of the cubby-hole, an' the indications are that they got nothing from the safe—papers weren't messed up at all. So that, whatever he was after—which it is immensely important for us to get before those other bounders do—must be still concealed in the cubby-hole in that room. An' it's somewhere in the floor. Presumably, it's not out in the center of that parquetry



floor because the cracks would gradually wear apart and show a bit wider than the other ones adjoining. In the squares of the border, however, next to the baseboards an' book-shelving, that would be far less noticeable. In fact, a square easily could be shoved back under them. I'd say it wouldn't be very far from the desk an' fireplace. We know about where to look. The question is, when? Do we take Lady Fermory into our confidence, or not?"

"Decidedly not! She'd get the wind up that we might discover something that would disgrace Fermory and his whole family. Wait a bit! Fancy I've an idea which'll work out. For at least a fortn't, that house in Stanhope Square will be under surveillance from Scotland Yard. But Sir James won't annoy Lady Mary and Pat by putting his men inside."

"We tell her it's quite likely the murderers may try to get into that room again after whatever they didn't get the other time, and ask her permission to have somebody on watch in there every night for a few weeks—sometimes one of ourselves—sometimes one of the F. O. men whom she knows and likes. Nothing in that to indicate any

evidence against Fermory—merely an attempt to get his murderers, which she naturally will desire as much as we do. Durin' the nights we're on watch, we can search that room to our heart's content—an' may catch those rotters as well."

"There's an element of pretty serious risk in that, old chap! If that brute ever does get his chance to shoot first—good night! Ffrench was one of the best an' quickest shots in the service, y'know."

"Well this rotter with his made-to-order gun has got me a good bit int'rested. Let's just figure out the brute's psychology if we can, and then be on the spot at the right moment. What?"

"As I see it, he'll give the Yard men about ten days to relax their vigilance in that neighborhood. Then he'll think out some scheme that nobody would dream of his trying, an' come rather close to getting away with it. So my idea would be to start



Smith's arm went up like a rattlesnake striking—but there was a jet of flame from the divan, a report—the gun was torn from his smashed fingers.

our watch in that library about three nights from now and make a business of finding that cubby-hole before our gunman gets set to start anything."

The Fermory mansion, like the others on two sides of the Square, backs up, not to a mews, as do the houses on the remaining sides, but to the rear gardens of houses on another street. There is an alley between the rear walls of the gardens, with doors opening into each one, but this alley has no outlet to any street; you must enter it through one of the houses on either side.

When Sir James ordered a detail of one constable to be constantly on duty in the little rear court below the library windows, the simplest way for this man to reach it was through coal-cellars and servants' quarters in the basement, another constable being on duty in the front basement entrance where he could be seen by the man on duty a hundred feet away at the corner of the Square. On the chance that the murderers might have been among Her Ladyship's guests on the night of the tragedy—when

they went through her invitation-list, Smith and Borno-vitch seemed possibilities from her description of them as men for whom Fermory had requested cards—the constables were ordered to follow any callers up the steps to the front door, go into the house with them if they were admitted upon any request, and stand by until they went out again.

So when Trevor, Lammerford and Prince Abdool arrived at the Fermory house Saturday night to spend several hours in the library, they were reasonably certain of security from any interruption by the murderers. All three had

made a point of going out into the little court and chatting with the P. C. on duty so that they would recognize his face even in a poor light, also the constable in front. Trevor's first action when they were locked in the library had been to open the middle window and speak to the constable below. Then he fastened all the windows—drew the curtains—and produced a black silk domino which covered the entire figure and had holes for the eyes.

"One of us is to stand or sit for a half-hour shift behind the window curtains, with this domino on so there's no light spot on him for a target in case somebody fired from the court or the alley wall. When he comes off watch, one of the other two relieves him. Point is to keep an eye on Constable Murphy all the time. Presumably Murphy's all right—known to everybody at the Yard—but that's not saying he's going to remain all right down in that court durin' the entire night. Do I take first watch—or one of you? —Very good, Abdool. In with you when I switch off the light! Now then, Lammy! Let's use our antennæ a bit, like a beetle, instead of charging at the proposition bull-headed like an elephant. Think out loud."

"Well, suppose I'm Fermory, having had that safe installed an' concealed to my liking. I'm now considering the smaller security-box, an' have decided

upon the floor. Point about the border-squares of the parquetry seems well taken. If we examine those squares with our four-cell flashlights, I've no doubt that locatin' the right one is merely a question of minutes. But locatin' the mechanism is something else again. He'd want that mechanism pretty close to his desk an' swivel-chair, because he might have the box open, hear somebody comin' along the corridor, an' have to shut it in a hurry. I'll just sit in his chair an' consider that. Well, the end of the book-shelves isn't more than a couple of feet away. Wonder if this desk is movable? Rug underneath, but it looks to me as if— Aye! Desk goes through it, five electric switches underneath. Fancy I'll not experiment with them. If Fermory was what we now think, he may have been cold-blooded enough to fix up something which would destroy this room an' everything in it!"

"Your book-shelving is too obvious a place for that mechanism, Lammy," observed Trevor. "My fancy would be somewhere about that big fireplace, I think."

"Movable hearthstone, or tile?"

"Too likely to be spotted when the cracks get worn a bit. No. Something about the oak mantel or hood—possibly something within reach, up the flue—"

"I'll throw a flash up there! My word! . . . There is a lever! Watch the floor while I pull it down!"

"Got it, Lammy—got it! Steel box underneath that'll take some doing to get into."

"Key or combination?"

"Combination—three or four numbers. Four, I fancy."

"This is where a bit of foresight tells. You were dead right in suggestin' that we fetch along your patent window-pane microphones with head-receivers an' cords! I practiced a bit with one of the most celebrated safe-breakers in the United Kingdom after he'd done a stretch at Dartmoor, and learned a few things. Now watch!"

Pressing the rubber rim of the microphone firmly down on the steel at the edge of the lock, His Lordship slowly turned the knob until he heard a faint "click"—then in the other direction, then back, then again. He gave the knob a firm turn, and pulled up the lid. The Marquess whispered to keep it closed for a moment—stepped over to the window and said "*Abdool!*" in a low tone.

"*Aie, O Thakur Bahadur.*"

"Is Murphy all right, down there?"

"*Aie, Huszoor*—walking up and down to keep warm."

"Keep watching him steadily for a couple of minutes!" said Trevor urgently.

Going over to the corridor door, Trevor then placed his own microphone against it—listened intently. He heard Sniffin guzzling a drink of whisky out in the drawing-room, then hurried back to Lammerford and the box, scribbling upon a sheet of note-paper: "*Compliments of Downing Street.*"

"Quick, Lammy—scoop out everything!" he directed. "Stow as much as you can inside your undershirt. I'll take the rest! Then just lay this paper on the bottom of the box an' close everything up! We'd best get out of here while the getting is good! Achmet will have the car parked in front of the house ready to start on the jump! Everything in order? Done! Come along, Abdool—roll up the domino an' stuff it in your pocket!"

Telling the constable outside that they had decided not to remain longer that night, they hurried to Park Lane and called for the Marchioness, then divided up the coded sheets among them, and sat around the long table in the Jacobean library working at a translation—which Lammerford got in about an hour, having specialized upon supposedly undecipherable codes.

ON the show-down, they found themselves in possession of communistic plans and organized activities which gave them a deal of serious thought. Papers which Fermory had concealed in the box gave fairly thorough details of the organization in the United Kingdom and the States—lists of names which they at once sent around to Major Broadhurst in Downing Street by messenger. In fact, their getting possession of those papers probably set communistic revolutionary plans back indefinitely.

This was all to the good. Reggie Ffrench hadn't given up his life for nothing. But they were more determined than ever to exact other lives for his. A week later when police vigilance was relaxing a bit, they began their night-watch in the Fermory library—the Marquess and Snaith one night, Earl Lammerford and Broadhurst the next, then Prince Abdool and one of the junior F. O. men. When something finally did happen on the seventh night—with the Marquess and Snaith in the room—it came about in an amazingly unexpected way.

A house which backed up to the alley at the other end of the block had been vacant two months. At one in the morning, six uniformed constables went into this house, apparently with keys from the agent. They walked through it, cut into the alley at the back, along the alley

to the grounds back of the Fermory house, where they rapped on the door in the brick wall and called out Murphy's name.

Murphy heard a police whistle, very low, and unlocked the door—saw the detail of constables in the alley and stepped through.

Something like white-hot flame jabbed through his side. Then they laid him down in the alley. Leaving two men in the little rear court, the other four went back through the vacant house—around into the Square—mounted the Fermory steps and rang the bell. A sergeant gave a sharp order to the constable in the basement entrance that he was to admit nobody to the house. Then a very sleepy and annoyed Sniffin opened the door to say that, "'Er Ledyship was not h'at 'ome."

"We know that, you fool! Away for the week-end with her daughter, we were told. But your burglar-alarm has been ringing for ten minutes in the station! Stand here in the hall and shout as loud as you can if anyone tries to break through this way!"

THEY hurried down the side hall, found the library door locked, and began pounding upon it:

"Open this door! Police orders! Open at once!"

The Marquess and Snaith—on the floor behind the divan—glanced at each other with amazed grins. This was something entirely unexpected—though somehow they didn't take much stock in the "police." The room was lighted merely by the electric lamp on the desk. In a moment a panel of the door was smashed; the key turned—and the four constables came into the room, looking about for other occupants.

Apparently there were none. It was quite likely that Sniffin had been sleeping on the divan, or reading, and had locked the door as he came out to admit them. A whisky decanter and glasses on the desk bore out this supposition. The idea of anyone being on watch in there didn't occur to any of them. Her Ladyship and daughter were away and the house was presumably occupied by servants only. Two of the constables had rubber truncheons in their hands. The others had automatics with silencers screwed upon the muzzles, that of the smaller man seeming to be of lighter caliber than the other's. One glimpse of this was enough for the Marquess. His eyes never left this smaller man, who seemed to be the leader.

"Rip this bloody room apart, boys!" this man directed. "Use your jimmies! Pry up every square of the floor where you can get an edge in. Rip out the bookcases! What we're after is in this room—and, by God, we'll get it before we go!"

A voice from the shadows back of the divan drawled: "I—er—doubt it, Smith! I really do, you know."

Smith's arm went up like a rattlesnake striking. But there was a jet of flame from the divan, a stunning report—the gun was torn from his smashed fingers and sent spinning across the room. Three more flashes, like machine-gun fire, smashed the hands of the other supposed constables. Subsequent shots shattered their leg-bones.

Then a bona-fide officer named Ennis came running in from the front of the house with the constable on duty and handcuffed the four. Former Top-sergeant Sniffin had instinctively suspected this detail of supposed constables and Ennis had agreed with him, having had no instructions about any such detail.

On the way to the station, a big touring car ran into the police van, killing one of the constables and severely injuring two others. Smith escaped. But Devereaux and Bornovitch didn't quite make it. Subsequently, they took the "nine o'clock walk, on the second clear Sunday"—at Pentonville!

The Caves of Dirha

By CAPT. ARMAND BRIGAUD

The Arab has a long memory, particularly when it is vengeance which he treasures in his mind.

THE experience I am about to relate jarred on my nerves in the fall of 1916, during the World War. I was at that time ailing on account of an unhealed wound, and being temporarily unfit for field duty, I was engaged in drilling native recruits. My battalion commander sent me to take charge of a couple of hundred young natives who had been called to the colors and were assembling near the village of Rabelais, which is located about one hundred miles south of Algiers.

The village of Rabelais was built a score of years ago by French immigrant farmers. The surrounding country is a semi-wilderness inhabited by a shifting Arabian population. However it is now a tame, perfectly safe territory. But I knew something about that part of Algeria which intrigued me uncommonly.

In the year 1845, the bloody year of the conquest of Algeria, my grandfather was a young lieutenant of the 53rd Line Regiment, which was commanded by Colonel Saint-Arnaud.

The French soldiers of King Louis Philippe were at that time tearing down the stubborn resistance of the Arabian tribes. Dressed in stiff-collared tunics and heavy shakos, armed with breech-loading, slow-firing guns, their undertaking was a feat that men of our effete age could never accomplish. And their temper was not at its best, for the Arabs were given to the practice which is now followed only by desert Beduins: they tortured their prisoners to death, with a cruel skill which in more modern times, was rivaled only by the American Indians and by the people of Indo-China.

Three miles south of the place where the village of Rabelais is now located, a stream called by the Arabs "Chabet el Bir," had carved across the centuries a winding cave into the side of a hill. This was the cave of Dirha, where in the past about five hundred tribesmen of the Sbeha Arabs hid at the news that Saint-Arnaud's troops were approaching.

Saint-Arnaud learned from his scouts of this fact. He detested the Sbehas because they had often ambushed, seized and tortured isolated parties of his men. He decided to surround the caves of Dirha and capture those who were hiding there.

It was the middle of August and the Chabet el Bir was dry.

The cave had two entrances, distant from each other about a hundred yards. But when the soldiers appeared in front of both passages and warned the Arabs to come out and surrender, the tribesmen answered with crashing salvos of musketry.

Saint-Arnaud was a hard man. He thought that, after all, those Arabs were murderous brigands, and he ordered the regimental sappers to fill one of the entrances with gravel and rocks; then he had loads of wood and dry grass stuffed into the other entrance. The soldiers applied a blazing torch; when the section of the cave in front of them

became filled with flames and smoke, they piled loose earth and stones on that second entrance too.

For an hour the companies stood with ready guns in front of the two blocked passages, ready to seize the Sbehas if they should succeed in breaking through the obstruction, and to shoot them down if they still showed fight. But evidently the flames had consumed quickly whatever oxygen was in Dirha's grotto, and the monoxide gas developed by the smoke had asphyxiated the Sbehas. The two piles of earth and loose stones piled in front of both passages remained untroubled.

At length Saint-Arnaud retired with his troops to the hills of Ain-Meran, where, while the soldiers cooked their evening meal, he wrote a letter to his brother who lived in Paris.

"Those brigands are as well dead," he wrote, speaking of the Sbehas whom he had buried alive. "Each of them, living, was a menace to our soldiers and a potential murderer. I think that I did the right thing in suppressing them. But, just the same, this happening has disgusted me with Africa."

I HAD heard my grandfather speak time and again of the grottos of Dirha, and now, being in the neighborhood, I decided to visit the scene of the wholesale execution. Although I did not approve of what Saint-Arnaud had done—even as my grandfather had not approved of it—the very mention of Dirha had always held for me a kind of morbid fascination.

But when I went for precise information to the functionary who ruled Rabelais, I found that either he knew nothing of the fact or he wished not to speak of it.

"The stream Chabet el Bir is three miles south of our village, but I have not heard of caves near by," he said, with a shrug of his plump shoulders. He offered me a cigarette and began speaking of the weather.

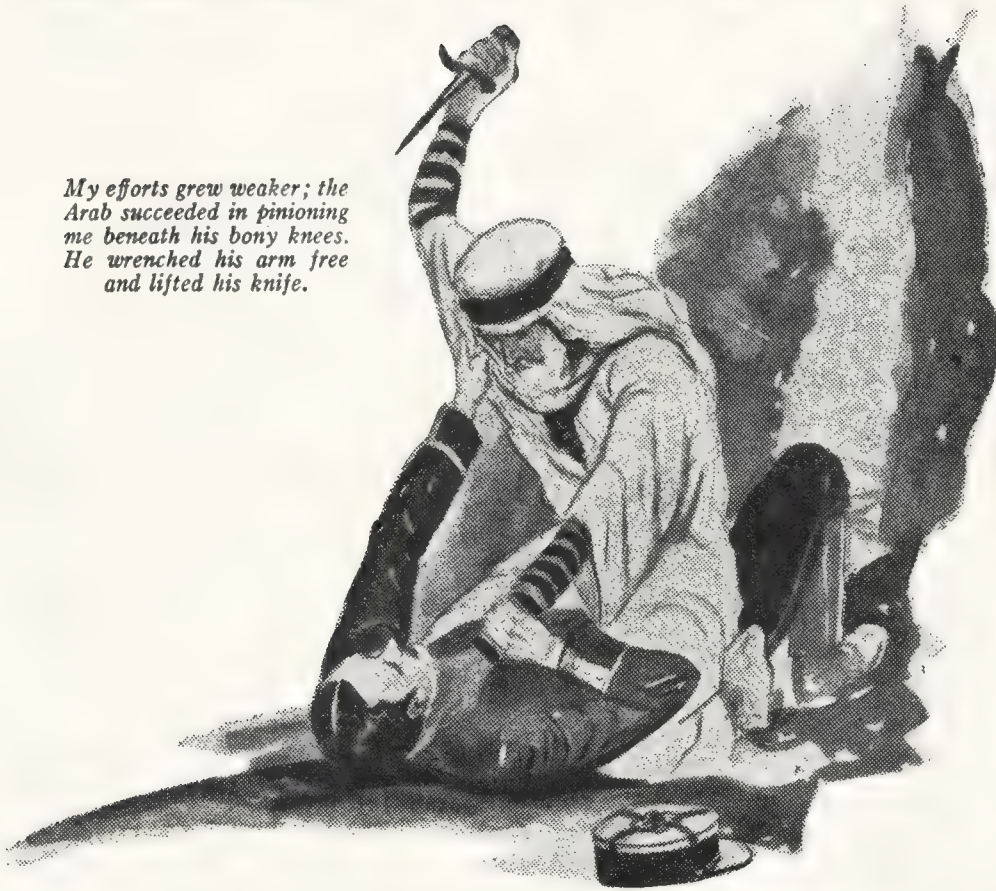
The tribe of the Sbehas has been administratively suppressed since the middle of the last century, but tribesmen of that people are still numerous around Rabelais. Therefore I went to a kind of head-man, a gray-bearded Arab with the eyes of a primitive philosopher, and asked him about Dirha.

"Five hundred of our people were killed there," the Arab said, stroking his beard. "I was a child at that time, but I remember the fact well. When the soldiers went away, the tribesmen who, under the concealment of the boulders garnishing the surrounding hills had seen what Saint-Arnaud had done, came down and grouped around the cave's entrances. One of them said:

"They will be dead by now. Let us not disturb the dead."

"But there was among them a certain Yusuf Zerif, who had much loved a woman who had been buried among the others," the old Arab continued. "I have loved that woman so much that I will go crazy if I can not press her

My efforts grew weaker; the Arab succeeded in pinioning me beneath his bony knees. He wrenched his arm free and lifted his knife.



lifeless form to my breast,' Yusuf said. 'If I can not have her alive, I will have her dead!'

The old tribesman paused musingly for a while, then smiled subtly.

"So, Allah willing," my ancient informer continued, "they removed the earth and the stones. When the pure air entered the cave they went within. *Inshallah, Sidi!* The dead were piled on each other and streamed like a litter of human straw from one end of the cave to the other—able-bodied warriors, old men, women and children. Only a few were carried from the cave still alive."

I easily found a Sbeha guide; every one of his tribe knew where the cave of Dirha was located. The day after, when my recruits were through drilling, I rode toward Dirha with my orderly and the guide.

We reached the caves around sundown. The cave proper was under a forlorn hillock, which arose between an arid valley called Oued el Azudy and the ravine which had been carved by the torrential waters of the Chabet el Bir, which at that time of the year, was a thin rivulet of sluggish water.

At the entrance of the cave both the guide and Menhed my orderly stopped, salaamed and said in unmistakable terms that they would go no farther.

"Because the cave is haunted by evil spirits, Sidi!" they asserted solemnly.

Menhed was a veteran who wore two well-deserved decorations on his wide breast. The Sbeha tribesman had the unmistakable appearance of a man who could prove, when aroused, a tough customer. But, knowing Arabs, I realized that no power on earth could induce them to enter a supposedly haunted cave. Therefore I pressed the button of my flashlight and entered alone.

Instantly a feeling of uncanny depression seized me. However, I pulled myself together and went on.

The winding cave was by no means uniformly wide. In some points it was several yards high and almost ten yards wide; in others it narrowed so much that to proceed I was

obliged to stoop, and my shoulders brushed against the sides of the rough corridor. There were also many obscure nooks and corners and brief corridors ending against a wall of rocks. Of course my exploration was a very superficial one; it would have taken a couple of days to explore properly that maze of muddy caverns and confused passages.

I emerged through the opposite passage, where I found Menhed and the Sbeha waiting for me.

"As you may easily see, in that cave there is nothing that can harm anyone," I observed. "The evil spirits exist only in your imagination."

"With the wish of Allah you were allowed to escape," the Sbeha remarked gravely. "And yet one cannot say. You visited the cave early, when the spirits are sleeping. Had you been here during the night, things would have gone differently."

"Rot!" I snapped, shrugging my shoulders. "If it would be my fancy, I would sleep for a night within the caves without any other harm than a cold!"

"You say that you would, but I know that you will not," the Sbeha sneered. "You would not dare to."

His insolence enraged me so that I lifted my *cravache*, ready to strike him. Then I realized that he meant not to offend me. In his Arabian mind there was no shame in being afraid of ghosts; surely the Sbeha could not see anything offensive in making me acknowledge that I dared not face Dirha's spirits. I lowered the whip and was about to leap in the saddle of the horse that Menhed held ready for me, when I noticed that my orderly was gazing at me dubiously.

I knew what that meant. As a true Arab, Menhed would repeat among the other soldiers that I had said I was willing to challenge Dirha's supernatural dangers—but that I had not gone through with my boast. He would retail that with true Arabian gossipy spirit, pointing out that I was a brave man in war, but that I feared the same things that they feared.

And I knew what the other soldiers would answer to that: "After all, he is just a man, and he did the right thing in the eyes of Allah." And from that moment they would perhaps like me more, but would obey me much less eagerly, because the Arab does not follow the one whom he likes, but the one whom he fears. In a word, my prestige would be destroyed.

"Tonight we will bivouac here. And I will sleep in the cavern," I announced.

The Sbeha argued fervently against this, tried to dissuade me from doing so. But Menhed said nothing. There was a proud smile on his face, as if to say: "Here is a man who fears not ghosts, and he is my chieftain!" He evidently basked in what he considered the reflected glory of a leader willing to do things that the bravest among Arabs would not dare to do.

In the very middle of the first and larger group of caverns ran the thin stream of the Chabet el Bir. Spurred by my example, Menhed built a litter of green branches and grass in a corner of a good-sized cave, and a large fire near by.

Then while I settled for the night he retreated hastily, glancing fearfully around him.

I remained alone. I was tired; my rustic couch was soft and the near-by fire radiated a comfortable warmth. I laid my head on my cloak, which had been rolled into an improvised pillow and instantly fell asleep.

I do not know how long I had been sleeping, but of a sudden, a dream agitated me. I felt that a menacing presence was near me.

Suddenly I awakened.

The fire still burned, and from the blazing branches piled on top of it arose thick wafts of a white, smoky substance, which smelled like a powerful drug. I felt strangely torpid, almost spent.

Something moved in one of the shadowy corners of the cave. Partly conquering, by a desperate effort, the drowsiness that benumbed my limbs, I propped myself in a sitting position. I dimly saw a long white shape dart crouching from one nook to another. Then the pungent smell coming from the fire enveloped me.

Strange to say, I felt keenly that something was menacing me, but, instead of being worried, I felt curiously exhilarated. Although my limbs were heavy and growing almost senseless by the second, all my mental faculties seemed relieved of every human care.

I thought of Menhed's and the Sbeha's suggestions that the cave was haunted. Perhaps it was, but that made no difference. I found myself waiting for a ghostly manifestation; I wanted to keep in touch with the beyond and enjoy its vagaries, whatever they could be. I realized that my ideas were not those of a sane man; I was going insane, perhaps, but I did not care.

My eyes were growing glazed and all the sensations of drunkenness were taking hold of me. Then, from that nook where it had disappeared, the eerie wraith seemed to emerge and advance toward me.

I saw a pair of glaring eyes staring ferociously at me; a curved, beaklike nose, a shaggy gray beard. It was an Arab, and he came stealthily like a great cat, gripping a long knife in his right hand.

"He is the ghost of one of the dead Sbehas, and he wants to kill me!" I thought in the riddle of crazed ideas racking my brain.

I tried to grasp the automatic that I had placed under the cloak pillow before retiring. I succeeded in doing so, but, drugged as I was, I lost my balance and fell on my side. Without knowing what I was doing, I pressed the trigger and fired a round; then, nauseated and faint, I let the gun fall among the loose grass of my couch.

FOR a few moments following the crashing of the report and the echoes it had wakened, I heard no other sound. Then the shuffling noise of an approaching footstep echoed in the deep silence of the cave.

My reasoning power had been blotted out, but the instinct rooted in me by years of experience as an African fighter was only slumbering and came to my help. My nervous fingers were unable to trace the gun, which had sunk into the grass, but with a desperate effort, I shook my head and managed to stumble on all fours.

With knife lifted high to strike, the old Arab had approached within my reach. He had moved slowly because he wanted to get me by surprise and had shuffled carefully to avoid the noise of his steps that would alarm me. He was thin, yet muscular, and his face disclosed an insane wrath.

I did not know if he was a living being or something beyond my comprehension, but my fighting experience made me perceive the second when he sprang and drunken and unsteady though I was, I slid under his blow, so that

his stroke slashed into thin air, and I rolled with him to the ground.

Under normal conditions my adversary would have been no match for me, but numbed as I was, his old muscles had the edge on my sluggish limbs. My blows carried no steam and my jiu-jitsu holds were not dangerous at all, because dazed as I was, I was unable to strike with them at the proper place. I managed, however, to check the frantic efforts of his armed wrist.

At length a great weariness seized me; I wanted to give up; I felt it was inevitable that I should be killed. My efforts grew weaker. The Arab succeeded in pinioning me beneath his bony knees. He wrenched his arm free and lifted his knife. The next moment a detonation crashed near by. I saw the old tribesman let go of the knife, clutch at his breast and fall backward. Then everything seemed to whirl rapidly around me and I lost consciousness.

When I reawakened I was out of the cave. The gleaming stars shone in the incredible cobalt blue of the sky above me.

"Are you well now, Sidi?" Menhed anxiously asked.

I BREATHED deeply of the clean night air and felt the strength flowing back into my limbs.

"What happened, Menhed?" I asked.

"*Inshallah* Sidi, I heard your gun! The Sbeha thought that you were fighting with the evil spirits and ran away. I wanted to go away too, at first, but I have been in battle at your side, Sidi, and I could not desert my salt.

"So I entered the cave and I shot the old man who was going to kill you. I dragged you away from there, because the cave was filled with the smoke of the burning Aun-elam herb."

I understood at once the reason of my numbness, of the vagaries of my brain which had made things so unreal for me within the cave—for the "Aun-elam" belongs to that group of African and Asiatic weeds from which is extracted hashish, the opium of the Arabs.

"But why did the murderer place aun-elam hemps on the fire?" I asked. "Why the smoke did not affect him too? And, after all, was it not easier for him to stab me during my sleep?"

"He was a canny old man," Menhed replied, shaking his head. "In the first place, Sidi, the smoke of the burning hemp does not daze the ones who are accustomed to inhale hashish by smoking it in a pipe.

"The man was old. He knew that you are strong, that you are a warrior. If you would have wakened before he would come close to you, you would have killed him had you seen him with a knife ready to strike; you would have spared him, had you seen him just stirring the fire.

"And, suppose that he stabbed you before drugging you—that his hand had trembled and had failed to kill you or to disable you at once; his days would have been forfeited too.

"To make sure that he would murder you, he planned skillfully to render you helpless before striking—and he would have succeeded if your shot had not alarmed me, if I had hesitated to run to your help. Do you know who the man was, Sidi?"

I did not know, for, dazed as I was, I had been unable to see clearly the face of my aggressor.

"He was the very man of whom you inquired about the caves of Dirha," Menhed continued. "The young Sbehas have forsaken the feud and would not harm a white man. But the old ones still remember the cave, streamed with the dead of their tribe.

"The old headman showed you how to reach those caves and planned to murder you. And, *Inshallah*, by but little he failed in succeeding!"

The Bohunk

*You all know some one who's
had to be the drudge-horse,
while others got the glory.
And you'll all be glad to see
how one drudge-horse fought
his way out.*

By

HERBERT L. MCNARY

Illustrated by Harry Lees



MINGLED emotions stirred in the breast of Joe Koval as he watched the football squad practice for the coming professional season. It was only three years since Koval had worn the moleskins himself in high-school games. The time had passed quickly and yet he felt quite mature; but then, he had always felt mature. He looked youthful enough, however, as he stood on the sidelines. He was coatless and the collar of his white shirt was open, revealing a strong neck, at least size seventeen. Surmounting that neck was a strong, pleasing face, a rugged chin, a gentle mouth, kind blue eyes and coppery-gold hair with a natural wave in it. Joe Koval's head might have inspired thoughts of a bronze god, save that men didn't get bronzed who worked all day in a coal-mine.

There had been no work today for Joe, owing to a break in a pump. He had taken advantage of the unexpected holiday to look over the professional football team that represented the coal-mining city, in the National League. There were many new men in the line-up this year, including several who had been picked by at least one expert as All-American. Heisen, for example, had been picked by general consensus as an outstanding college back of the year before. Koval watched him with the respect and admiration of a fan, as Heisen booted punts in practice.

A return sailed over Heisen's head and rolled to Koval. "Hey, Bohunk, kick that ball in!" Heisen called.

Now Koval was of Bohemian parentage—or Czechoslovakian, as it was now distinguished in this melting-pot of races. Technically, Bohunks were of a different race of Slavs. Not that Koval minded being called a Bohunk. "Bohunk," "wop," "harp" or similar names were not of themselves offensive—it was all in how they were used. But Koval didn't like the reflection Heisen put on it. It was as if the conceit of All-America, the contempt for these miners who were paying his salary, was in that term "Bohunk."

Koval kicked the ball back. He found an outlet for his resentment in booting that ball with all the drive he had in his powerful legs. The ball sailed over Heisen's

head, kept on rising and spiraling and went true to the receiver to whom Heisen had been kicking. Heisen had been averaging better than fifty yards. This was over seventy.

Heisen stared in amazement. Jimmy Dirks, captain and coach of the team these past several seasons, also saw that kick. He walked up swiftly from the far end of the field.

"Hello, Joe," he said, in a friendly way that was entirely natural with him. "Haven't seen you since last year!" He let go of the hand he was shaking and jovially poked the smiling Koval in his stocky torso.

"Husnier than ever. Mining agrees with you. Say, that was some ride you gave the ball!"

"I was mad, I guess, Jimmy."

"Well, seeing you mad ought to be interesting. Say, how about putting on a uniform to help me out? I'd like to start a little scrimmage-work and I'm short of men."

"Sure, Jimmy."

He went to the locker shack with Dirks, where the latter dug up everything needed but the shoes. Pro' football players provide their own equipment.

"Where do you want me to play, Jimmy?" asked Koval when he was ready. "In the line?"

"No, just play in the backfield on defense."

Dirks formed his squad for scrimmaging. Koval heard Heisen say to the quarterback, without making much effort to lower his voice: "Let's have the ball. I want to have some fun with the Bohunk."

Heisen took the ball on the play and slipped off-tackle easily. He charged for Koval. But the latter likewise charged for him. Shoulders of iron braced by piano-sized legs struck Heisen amidships. He nearly broke in two. He stopped in midair with a gasp for breath, and the ball shot from his arms. Koval held him for an instant, then tossed him back as if he were a child.

"Say, Dirks," gasped Heisen in protest, when he could get his breath, "we're not in condition yet for that sort of stuff."

"Yeah, take it easy, Joe," reproved Dirks mildly. His



State got the ball—but Koval got little assistance now. Northern linesmen swarmed in on him.

keen eyes hadn't missed a thing. When he called an end to the work he walked alongside of Koval.

"Joe, I've asked you before—how about signing a contract? Coal-mining isn't all you expected, is it?"

"Promotion? don't come as fast as I had hoped," admitted Koval, his curly head bowed a bit. "But I couldn't play football. I couldn't travel around. I've got too many to look after."

"Still the family-man, huh? Say, how long have you been playing father to the numerous Kovals?"

"I was ten when my father was killed in the mine—twelve years ago."

"Twelve years. Well, some of the others must be grown up by now."

"Sure. Bertha's working this year. I made her take extra lessons in secretarial work, and she started off at eighteen a week." Joe's blue eyes glowed with pride. "That's almost as much as Anna gets, and she's been working three years. Even the twins are making pin-money. And Aleck—he goes to college this year. He don't want to go, but he's going. He played summer baseball and could have played for a minor league, but I wouldn't let him turn pro—not until he finishes college."

"Say, Joe, why don't you go to college? I'd like to have you go to my college—State. Crowley could use you."

"Me?" laughed Koval. "I'm too old. Besides, I couldn't go."

"Why not? Do you want to be a miner all your life?"

"No. Aleck goes to college."

Koval dressed and walked home. These rolling hills with their outcropping of coal, their seared and sparse foliage, were not especially noted for scenic beauty, but in this twilight hour almost any place would seem dressed in Sunday best. It was a warm August afternoon, and football seemed an incongruous intrusion.

Koval turned into a neat cottage. Gladioli, zinnias and petunias did their best to crowd in as much color as the small plot of garden permitted. Koval found his mother

and brother Aleck in the kitchen. Joe's mother was a woman of good size, with gray hair and a pleasant face. Joe's blue eyes were obviously from her.

The sight of his brother lolling in a chair beside the kitchen table and drinking a glass of milk so near to supertime disturbed Joe. He frowned.

"Aleck, when are you going to see about getting what you need for college?"

Aleck, a big youngster of about eighteen and not unlike his older brother in appearance, stared sulkily at the glass of milk.

"I aint goin' to college," he said finally.

"Oh, yes, you are."

"Oh, no, I'm not."

"We've had that all out before. You're going."

"Yeah? A scout from the Baltimore Orioles wants me to try out for first base. I'm going to take it."

"You're going to college!"

"Please, boys—" Mrs. Koval interrupted.

"All right, Mother; I'll handle this." It was the father of the family speaking in this tone.

"Say," rebelled Aleck, rising, "how long do you think you can boss me? I'll do as I please." He started for the door.

"Come back here."

"Try and make me!"

Joe took a step toward his younger brother. Aleck turned defiantly. One could see from the look in his eyes that this was a moment upon which he had long dwelt. He had grown an inch taller than Joe. He was several pounds heavier. The young buck was ready to challenge for family leadership.

Joe's hands seized his brother's wrists. Aleck tried to twist away, at first trying to break the hold easily, then to struggle angrily. The veins stood out on his forehead; he began to perspire. In contrast Joe seemed to be exerting himself not the slightest. Twelve years in and around the mines had developed remarkably what would under any circumstances have been great strength.

"Le'me go, you big Bohunk!" cried Aleck, in tacit acknowledgment of physical inferiority.

"Let him go, Joe," requested the mother.

Joe relaxed his grip and Aleck pulled away.

"Why don't you go to college yourself if you're so crazy about it?" he growled.

He went out, slamming the door behind him. Joe dropped into the seat Aleck had vacated.

"Joe," said his mother, "why don't you do like Aleck says—and go to college yourself?"

He laughed. "That's the third time I've heard that in an hour."

"Well, why not? There is enough comin' in now so you could take the money you saved for Aleck, and go yourself. Joe, I could never tell you—but it don't make me so happy as you think, that you should make all the sacrifices what you do. It aint fair that any boy should be so good to his mother and his brothers and sisters—"

"Aw, Mother—"

"Sure, I know you like to do it. That is why I can't never tell you it don't make me so happy as you think. I can't be happy when I think you must be down in the mines all the time—like your father—"

She hurried on before he could interrupt her. "I know you don't belong in the mines. You belong outside. I would be more happy if you was outside where you could meet nice people, maybe a nice girl—"

"Aw, Mother, you know girls don't mean anything to me!"

"Because you don't never see girls what is good enough for my Joe! Outside will be different. You should take the money you save for Aleck. Colleges wasn't made for him. He is different from you. I'm his mother. I know my children."

Joe sat drumming his fingers on the tablecloth.

"All right, Mother." He rose and kissed her on the forehead. "I'll go 'outside'—if it will make you happy."

"Yes, Joe. —Where you go now?" she asked.

"I'll be back for supper."

Koval left the house and walked downtown. He was so preoccupied as he stepped off a curbing that he was nearly run down. The deep, mellow blast of a horn caused him to jump back, and a car of expensive make picked up speed, as the uniformed chauffeur glared at him. Koval saw the man in the back of the car and recognized him as Mr. Vardon, president of a corporation owning several of the mines in the vicinity. He never came from Chicago save on matters of grave importance. Joe recalled that at present there was some talk of wage-trouble.

A lady rode with Mr. Vardon—no, a girl; Koval caught a glimpse of her profile. She was good-looking, a brunette. She was probably no better-looking than many girls Koval knew by name in the town, but there was something here that made comparison with the girls he knew impossible. She had breeding, distinction; she belonged to the "outside"—that was it.

The car pulled away swiftly and Koval crossed the street to the hotel. Learning at the desk that Dirks was in his room, he went directly to the number given him and knocked.

"Hello, Joe," Dirks greeted him. "Going to sign a contract after all?"

"No, Jimmy. I've been thinking of what you said. Aleck don't want to go to college. Am I too old?"

"Twenty-two? No. That's older than the average Freshman, but many enter college older than that. Would you want to go to State?"

"Yes."

"Great! I'll get a letter off to Andy Crowley to watch out for you. You'll be in the same class with young Vardon. He's reputed to be a gridiron whiz, but I've heard that before. Oh, how are you for college credits?"

"All right, I think. I led my class in marks."

"You would, you big Bohunk!"

WHEN Joe Koval arrived at State and sought out Andy Crowley, he found the famous football coach up to his ears with Varsity problems. He took a satisfied look at Koval's size, asked a question or two, and then directed him to the Freshman coach Pete Newman, who had been a team-mate of Jimmy Dirks. Koval found this clean-cut chap busy also.

"Oh, yes, a protégé of Jimmy Dirks! Where do you play, Koval?"

"I played tackle and—"

"Great! I'll need tackles. Most important place in the line—full of responsibility."

Koval had meant to add that he also played backfield, but—responsibility, well, that did seem to be the task for him!

Koval didn't meet young Vardon until the large Freshman squad reported for practice. He didn't meet him then—he merely saw him. He heard one Freshman point Vardon out to another Freshman with a touch of awe. Koval looked and saw a slender, dark youth chatting briskly with a group of candidates who appeared grateful for this attention. Dick Vardon looked speedy. Koval understood that he had a great prep-school record as a broken-field runner.

He didn't become acquainted with young Vardon until the final cut left them both on the first team. The coach assigned Koval to right tackle. In the opening game he held like Gibraltar on the defense and opened holes on the offensive through which Vardon raced. Following one of these runs Vardon came back and happily slapped Koval on the back.

"That's the way, you old Bohunk! What a steam-roller you turned out to be!"

Koval thought he liked young Vardon and he thought young Vardon liked him. True, neither demonstrated this friendship, but that was largely because Koval's age difference of three or four years made him hold himself somewhat aloof from these "kids." Vardon revealed himself as temperamental—some might call it spoiled. He reminded Koval of Aleck. Vardon was quick to blame anyone when his plays were gummed up.

KOVAL saw very little of Andy Crowley in this Freshman season, and Crowley saw little of him. But Crowley had a book in which were jotted the observations of others who had seen the Freshmen play:

"VARDON: Fast, good change of pace, strong on plays to right, poor to left and on line plays. Fair kicker, good passer and triple threat, average defensive. Temperamental and high-strung. Poor loser.

"KOVAL: Great power, stop all plays in reach. Fast for size but not shifty. Will need good end to swing in plays. Intelligent and studious. Good leader, but not aggressive."

Other names followed. Koval was being given more consideration than he imagined.

State Freshmen had a successful year, far more successful than the Varsity. Koval played well in the line and Vardon ran sensationally, particularly when he ran through holes opened by Koval. The Freshmen had their real tough game when they battled their traditional rival, Northern, in the season's final game for them. Northern had a powerful line. From tackle to tackle it greatly outweighed State, man for man, save for Koval. Consequently, State concentrated on Koval's position for its offensive plays, and Northern united in trying to batter down this bulwark at the beginning of the game.

Koval rose to greater heights than ever before. He became a raging giant; he flung aside his headguard early in the game and his curly, golden shock of hair made him more conspicuous to the spectators. But he never thought of that; he forgot he was being watched.

Vardon played well. He shot off right tackle for several long runs and early in the third quarter raced eighty yards for what proved to be the winning touchdown. Koval was at his best in hurling back Northern's desperate fourth-quarter assaults.

The game ended and the teams cheered one another and started to leave the field. Comparatively few spectators witnessed the Freshman game. These were mostly relatives who now came on the field to congratulate or sympathize, as the situation called for. Koval's mother

and his sister Anna had come to Chicago to see the game. Koval was searching for them when he came upon Vardon in a family group. Koval saw the girl of the automobile, the girl with the dark eyes and aristocratic face.

"But, Dick," he heard her say, "why not ask that blond giant who played so stunningly?"

"Aw, he wouldn't fit with our crowd, sis. He's just a Bohunk."

That remark pulled Koval out of the clouds to which the excitement of the game had lifted him. It stung for a moment, but he stoically shrugged his shoulders and altered his course. He found his mother a moment later.

"Joe, Joe," she exclaimed, "are you hurt?"

"Hurt?"

"Yah, those bullies—they jump on you and pound you."

"That isn't the way to hurt me, Mother."

The answer was a bit cryptic, but when her son made no attempt to elucidate, the mother didn't press him.

With the football season ended Koval devoted his time to his studies. He kept in athletic condition by running up and down apartment-building steps as a milkman.

When he returned as a Sophomore Andy Crowley sought him out. The coach was an average-sized, stocky man in the forties and partly bald. He was a good dresser and had a grim expression that gave him a reputation for being more hard-boiled than was actually the fact.

"Koval, how would you like to be the third party in Vardon's dorm this year?" he asked. And before Koval could recover from his surprise the coach went on: "Frankly, I've got to build my offense around Vardon. He's temperamental—rich, son of a coal baron, and all that. You're somewhat older and more serious. He needs some one to pat him on the back and give him a word of advice when he needs it—diplomatically, because he isn't partial to advice. You know, sort of big-brother him."

"That ought to be easy," said Koval with a smile. "I've been doing that all my life."

"So Jimmy Dirks tells me."

"But how will Vardon feel about my—er—living with him?"

"Oh, it's all right. I've talked to him. He likes you. He may patronize you a bit, and"—the coach looked away—"he may not ring you in on all his society dates—"

"I get you. That's all right with me."

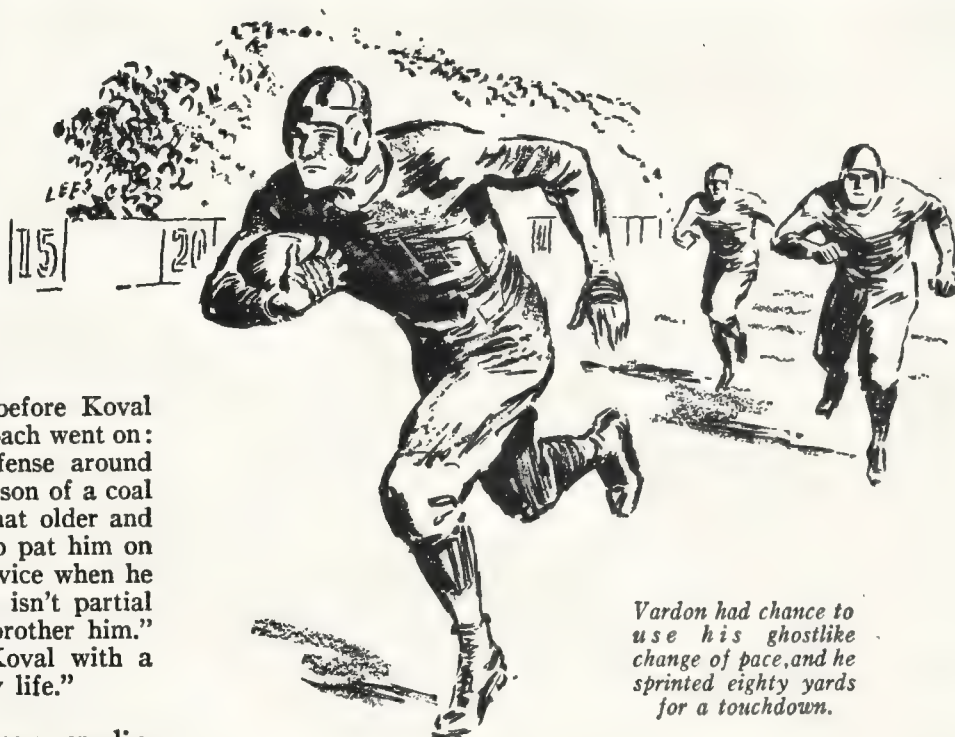
The arrangement worked out satisfactorily. Koval succeeded in preserving the proper balance. On the gridiron, however, the combination didn't work out so well as expected. Koval and Vardon won a first-string tackle and backfield position respectively and in the first two games on the schedule performed well. Vardon made runs of eighty, seventy and fifty-five yards in two quarters of the first game and gleaned a wealth of publicity. In the second game he repeated with three long runs off right tackle for touchdowns. But the next week a stronger and smarter team than either of the first two stopped Vardon dead. Moreover, the same teams made numerous gains off State's right tackle. This team and the team that met State the following Saturday had discovered the weaknesses of Vardon and Koval, which were already jotted down in Crowley's little red book. Vardon was sensational only to his right, and the teams played him accordingly. Koval could stop any play directed at him, but by

shifting wide opponents forced the end to play too close or succeeded in boxing him. Koval had the strength of an ox, but he wasn't sprightly.

Crowley spent several sleepless nights in figuring things out and awoke one morning with a solution that appealed to him. That afternoon with trepidation he put Koval in the backfield to play number three to Vardon's number four. Koval thought he was slow in getting the new assignments, but Crowley seemed satisfied. He drilled Koval for two days, then put him in the A backfield.

Team B couldn't stop the off-tackle smash with Vardon running from kick position. The running guard and the first backs might be handled by the opposing efforts of end, tackle, wing-back, center and full-back, but whoever survived had the bruising bulk of Koval hurled against him. Crowley further complicated matters by having Vardon toss an occasional pass from this formation.

Then he tried the same play off left tackle, Vardon's previous weakness. A wide grin suffused the coach's face



Vardon had chance to use his ghostlike change of pace, and he sprinted eighty yards for a touchdown.

as he called back Vardon, whose trail had been blazed with the wreckage of Team B.

State was to entertain the Wolverines on Saturday. The consensus of opinion had called Vardon an early-season flash. The Wolverines and the host of followers who packed half the stadium were confident of victory.

State received and carried to the twenty-yard line. The teams lined up. Vardon went back to kicker's position. The Wolverines expected a smash off right tackle and played accordingly. A wealth of interference swept off left tackle. Men piled up. Wolverine arms reached for the runner—and apparently an ox bowled them over. Vardon broke loose. He had complete chance to use his ghostlike change of pace, and he sprinted eighty yards for a touchdown. A few minutes later Koval carried him by the line of scrimmage and he raced away for another score. He scored three more touchdowns by the time the quarter ended. Then Crowley took him out.

Crowley was satisfied to create the impression that Vardon could keep on scoring touchdowns and that no other State back could succeed in his place. None did.

Koval carried them by the line of scrimmage, but none of the other backs approximated Vardon's elusiveness.

The history of State's football team for the remainder of the schedule was the history of Vardon. He continued to reel off brilliant runs. Those experts who failed to pick him on their All-American teams refused to do so on the assumption that no Sophomore deserved the rating.

Vardon returned to carry on in his Junior year of football where he had left off the year before. But he was a different Vardon—Koval saw that very quickly. Vardon's long runs of the year before had thrilled no one more than himself. But with the re-opening of college Vardon had accepted the mantle of fame as permanently his.

But the attitude of the public changed also. It is natural to have eyes only for the man with the ball, particularly when that man is a sensational runner such as Vardon. But now the fans began to do more than expect; they began to ask. The sport-writers discovered Koval and the public took a liking to him. Naturally, the scribes responded by giving large doses. They pointed out that it was the Bohunk who made Vardon's runs possible. There was truth in this, but the writers neglected to mention that others running behind Koval on the same plays failed to reel off sensational gains. Vardon was in a class by himself as a broken-field runner, and Koval would have been the last to argue otherwise. He admired Vardon.

Vardon threw down a Monday paper that contained a review of Saturday's game.

"Say, Bohunk, have you hired a press-agent?"

Koval looked up from a book.

"You pay too much attention to the papers," he said.

He meant that Vardon permitted himself to be unreasonably disturbed by what he had just read, but Vardon permitted himself to believe that Koval was accusing him of egotistically seeking complimentary notices. His dark eyes sparkled with anger.

"Oh, *you're* calling me a grandstand player, are you? Well, let me tell you something. You're getting too damn' familiar for a bohunk! Crowley put you in here to spy on me, and I suppose my father is slipping you something to do the same thing."

"It's news to me," stated Koval calmly, "that your father should think it necessary you should be watched. Perhaps it is just as well, then, that some of your achievements don't get into the paper."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you've been breaking training. You have been slipping out to South Side parties—"

"What business is it of yours if I do? You've got a rotten conceit if you think a coal-miner can tell *me* what company to choose! You social-climbing bohunk—"

KOVAL stared at him, then advanced quickly. Vardon stiffened, expecting attack. He made a pass at Koval, but the latter brushed the fist aside and seized Vardon by the arms. He held him the same way he held his brother Aleck that day in the kitchen. When Vardon ceased his struggles Koval smelled his breath.

"Where is it?" he demanded. Vardon looked defiant.

"Where is it?" repeated Koval.

"In—in my bag."

Koval crossed to a bag and opening it, took out a nearly empty half-pint bottle. He put it in his pocket and came back to Vardon. The latter sullenly averted his gaze. Koval looked down on him. There was far more than the actual difference of three years in the Bohunk's tone.

"I don't like playing policeman, but it seems as if it always must be my job to tell people where to head in. We've got some jobs to do—and we've got to do them well. You've got to get rid of a lot of foolish ideas. What

difference does it make who gets the publicity so long as we know we have carried through our assignments? We're not playing for the papers. We're getting our pay in self-respect. Please don't short-change yourself."

UP to Saturday Vardon had stubbornly refused to speak to or notice Koval. This attitude added fuel to the report of dissension in the State squad. The public believed that jealousy had caused a serious lack of coöperation between Vardon and Koval. Vardon seemed to derive a morbid satisfaction out of the situation.

State won the game, though only by a 7 to 6 score. But two games remained, Midland and the big game with Northern.

On the Monday night before the Midland game Koval sat alone in the room shared by himself and Vardon. Vardon, still refusing to speak to Koval, had acquired the habit of staying out until he believed Koval had gone to bed. Koval was about to retire when the phone rang. He answered it. "Koval," Joe said.

"This is Muriel Vardon, Dick's sister. Is Dick there?"

"No. Is it anything important, Miss Vardon?"

"Yes. It is very important—I wonder if you could meet me in the lobby of the Sherwood as quickly as possible?"

"Yes, surely."

Koval left the college grounds and hailed a taxi which carried him swiftly to the Sherwood House. He recognized Muriel Vardon as she came quickly toward him.

"You wouldn't know me, Mr. Koval," she greeted, extending a slender, gloved hand, "so I shall have to introduce myself. I have seen you play, you know."

"And I have seen you," Koval assured her. "I saw you talking to Dick after the Freshman Northern game, and I saw you once before that in Pottsville, when you visited our city with your father."

"You have a flattering memory." She smiled; then her features became more serious. "A friend of mine phoned me that Dick was at a night-club—and becoming unruly. Isn't he running a risk of being dropped from the football team and from college?"

"Yes," agreed Koval, repressing his concern. "I'll get him and take him back to college with me."

"I have my roadster outside," stated Muriel.

She drove Koval through busy streets and pulled up in a dimly lighted thoroughfare near the "black-and-tan" district.

"I'll wait here and keep the motor running," she told him. "You may have some trouble getting in, but here is a card of a prominent politician, a friend of my father's."

Koval took the card and ascended the narrow stairs to the second floor where a hard-boiled guard who would appear more at home in pugilist's trunks than in the dress-suit he wore, stopped him. The card, coupled with the fact that Koval was alone, persuaded the guard to pass him along. He had to pass two other scrutinizers before a headwaiter accepted him.

He followed the headwaiter until his searching eyes found Vardon sitting at a table near the dancing square. With him were two men and three girls.

Vardon looked up in surprise as Koval stood over him.

"Come along, Dick."

"Wh' th' hell?" protested Vardon. "How'd a bohunk get in here? —Hey, Tony," he called, raising his voice. "Throw this bohunk out!"

Koval reached down and lifted Vardon out of his chair. His two male companions jumped up and let punches fly at Koval. He ducked one; the other caught him high on the head. He dropped Vardon, reached out and seized the other two. He banged their heads together and dropped



Koval banged their heads together and dropped them, stunned. The place was in an uproar.

them, stunned. Then he lifted Vardon. The place was in an uproar. Bouncers came running toward the table.

At first Vardon resisted; the next moment he went limp in Koval's arms.

Muriel heard the shouting and the clatter of footsteps before Koval burst through the street door, bareheaded, and with Vardon over his shoulders. Behind Koval came four or five angry bouncers. Koval dumped Vardon into the seat beside his sister and turned on the bouncers. He drove at them in a football charge, bowling them over like interference-men. Two staggered back erect; Koval swung left and right, and dropped them. Then he sprang to the running-board of the car as Muriel shot away.

At the corner Koval slipped into the seat. The limp Vardon sagged between them.

"I'm sorry," said Koval. "Dick didn't understand, and I had to tap him on the chin."

"I'm sure he deserved it," said the girl crisply. "He is exasperatingly childish at times."

"Oh, he's a good kid," Koval assured her loyally.

They drove in silence and at high speed toward the college. Koval watched her clever hands control the wheel, and shift gears. They reached the college grounds.

"Better stop here," advised Koval. "I'll get him in all right. Just forget what happened tonight."

"That's a large order," she said with a smile. "I can forget something—but not everything."

She slipped into gear and rolled away quickly.

The following morning and thereafter Vardon took refuge in his "silence-strike."

Crowley came to Koval. "Joe, what's this about Vardon being in some scrape the other night?"

"You wouldn't expect me to tell you, would you?" asked Koval mildly.

Crowley colored slightly. "You're right. If I knew the facts I suppose I would have to drop the kid. I wouldn't want to do that. Not because he's absolutely necessary to win the Northern game, but for his own sake. He's so prominent socially and as a football-player that a

scandal would blast his whole future—probably make a rotter of him."

"Yes—we want to help him. I was thinking, Coach, it might be a good idea to let me carry the ball in the Midland game. We can win it easy, but I could carry the ball a few times and make a mess of things."

"What's the idea?"

"Well,"—and Koval shifted weight uneasily. "There's a lot of talk about me thinking I'm more important than Dick and as a result not pulling with him. Dick's sore on me. If I was to get shown up in the Midland game he might go like a cyclone in the Northern game."

"But you'll get a lot of razzing."

"I don't mind. In a few days, everyone forgets."

Crowley sponsored some clever publicity that week that created the impression that he was going to let Koval show how good a carrier he was in the soft Midland game. Koval gave an exhibition—and what an exhibition! He fumbled, got thrown for losses and tangled himself in clumsy spills.

Crowley, feigning indignation, pulled him out and sent in Vardon. Vardon, wearing a broad grin of satisfaction, hurried to his position and proceeded to run wild, scoring three touchdowns in fifteen minutes.

"The Bohunk Knows Now Who the Real Player is in State's Backfield."

One paper ran that headline, and it summarized nearly all the accounts of the game. Koval found that headline pinned on the inside of his room door. He smiled. Some day, he mused, Dick Vardon would grow up; maybe the development would take place before Saturday.

In the practice sessions preliminary to the big game, Koval acted like a chastened sinner, humble and anxious to redeem himself. Dick Vardon ran through his plays lightly and cockily.

The big day arrived. Spectators crowded the vast stadium to see two undefeated teams meet for the Conference title.

Northern received a short kick-off and brought it back

to midfield for the first break of the game. Forming confidently, the Northern eleven ripped through for first down on two plays. Koval broke through and hurled the runner for a loss on the next play, but a lateral made up the difference, and a yard beside. With but a yard to go the Northern quarter gambled or had a lapse of judgment and called for a forward. It worked, and a Northern end took it over for a touchdown.

State received and put the ball in play on the twenty-yard line. A line play failed to gain. Vardon carried on the next play. Koval cleared out beautifully, but Vardon lagged and a trailing end pulled him down from behind for a loss. Fuming with disappointment, Vardon went back to kick and got off a short low punt. The Northern quarter carried it back to the thirty-yard line. Another forward worked and the dazed State players saw the scoreboard reading 14 to 0 against them. It looked like a rout.

Northern scored a third touchdown in the closing minutes of the half. The players trooped off the field with the score reading 21 to 0.

THE State players flopped disconsolately on benches and floor of the locker-building. Crowley came in and surveyed them disgustedly.

"Why not get dressed? The game's over for you fellows, isn't it? Vardon, according to the press you were going to show us something today. Where is it?"

"How can I do anything when the Bohunk is laying down on me?" demanded Vardon peevishly.

Crowley strode over to him.

"Listen, you pampered youth, we've been hoping that you would grow up and get a little sense into your head! If it wasn't for the Bohunk you wouldn't be in today's game; you wouldn't even be in college. What happened downtown one night last week you and he know—and I don't. But I do know the only laying-down the Bohunk ever did in his life was last Saturday, when he deliberately made a bum out of himself in hope that he could jolt you into showing something today. But it's always been my theory that you can't fake class. He showed me something last Saturday. He showed me that he could carry like a real line-plunger."

The coach turned to the quarterback.

"Jennings, use that Number Seven play. I put it in for just such an emergency."

He wheeled to Koval.

"Koval, carry that ball till you drop, and knock that line to hell. Vardon stays on the bench this half."

"Oh, no, Coach," protested Koval.

"I'm giving orders," snapped Crowley. "Who do you think is coaching this team?"

The teams emerged for the second half. State's cheerleaders led an earnest effort to inspire the players with badly needed encouragement.

State lined up without Vardon.

State received. On the first running play Koval hit the center on a line buck. He only made four yards, but he made four yards on the next play and a third four yards on the following play. State drove up the field with Koval bending back Northern's line. Sometimes the defense piled up and held him to a yard or less, but usually he punched a hole for four yards or more. Jennings mixed in forwards to keep the secondary back.

State drove down to the twenty-yard line before a penalty halted the drive.

State got the ball again on its twenty-five-yard line and started another drive with Koval blasting out holes in the line. This time Northern couldn't stop the drive and Koval went over for a touchdown. The extra-point try failed. Another drive, with Koval banging the line,

brought the ball down to the shadow of Northern's goal and this time a completed forward gave State its second touchdown.

The teams changed for the final quarter with the score reading, Northern 21, State 13. State got the ball, and Koval smashed into the fresh replacements Northern sent in. But State's linesmen were being used up. Northern forwards broke through the substitutes and limited Koval's gains. Yet he plugged ahead tirelessly and drove across for a third touchdown. Again the extra try failed. Northern led by a slight margin. State got the ball, but Koval received little assistance now. Northern linesmen swarmed in on him. Drives were certain to peter out.

Vardon went to Crowley.

"Let me in, will you, Coach?" he begged humbly. "I—I think I can help Joe put it over again."

"Sure!" Crowley slapped him on the back and sent him in. One play had to transpire before Vardon could speak to Koval. Then in sight of the many thousands, he extended his hand to the Bohunk.

"I'm sorry, Joe, for everything. I hope it's all right with you."

"Sure, Dick—it always was," answered the bruised and battered Koval with an easy smile. "Let's you and I show these bozos something."

On the first play Vardon carried behind Koval and made twenty yards. He followed with other long runs. He was a fresh, ghostlike runner in against tired replacements.

On a fourth down he raced sixty yards for what the wild State rooters took to be the winning touchdown. But their cheers changed to groans when the ball came back on a holding penalty.

"Never mind, Dick," Koval told the disappointed boy. "That was just a sample."

BUT Vardon just missed the first down and Northern took the ball. Northern stalled as long as possible, and with a minute or so of play left kicked outside on State's ten-yard line. Vardon made nine yards. Koval plunged through for a first down. Then on the next play Vardon ran behind Koval, cut back, danced through the secondary and twisted his way down the field for an eighty-yard run and touchdown to win the game. . . .

An assistant manager came to Koval as he finished dressing and told him he was wanted. Koval followed wonderingly and came to a private room in the locker-building. Entering, Koval found Dick, the elder Vardon, Muriel, and a handsome gray-haired woman awaiting him.

"Joe," declared young Vardon, "we've just had a family cleaning and I opened the sweeper and let out all the dirt. And I wanted to be the first to tell you that I'm voting for you for captain."

"For me?" asked Koval in surprise.

"Why not? It wouldn't seem natural not to have you bossing me. Dad's interested in you too. He says executive prospects with practical experience are hard to find in the coal business. And Mother wants to meet you."

The genial lady extended her hand. "I want to give you a mother's thanks for what you have done for my son," she said.

"And how about little Muriel?" asked the girl, stepping up. "Am I to be left out in the cold?"

Koval turned to her with an embarrassed smile.

"Now that Dick and I are good friends—maybe I can see you sometimes."

"Sometimes?" she trilled. "Why not *often*? You know, ever since that Freshman game I've been prostrated with the desire to run my fingers through your hair!" And with a mischievous smile she did so, adding: "You great big Bohunk, you!"

The Golden Stranger

By

ALEXANDER SPRUNT, JR.



The only animal blocking the cheetah's conquest of the island was the old wildcat, not so large—but fiercer.

Illustrated by Lee Townsend

THE crew of the schooner had long since given up hope; they were numb and dazed, even apathetic. For a day and a night the hurricane had held them in its relentless grip; now they waited, stolidly, for the end. The fury of the wind was appalling; it roared, shrieked, howled with a thousand tongues of demoniacal rage; it tore at the stumps of masts and shattered deck-houses like a hugely destructive, clawing hand. It was smothering and gigantic.

There came a sudden shock, an abrupt cessation of the fearful speed with which they had been driving before the storm. A rending crash rose, even above the shrieking of the tempest. The schooner had run full upon a reef and went to pieces like a ripe melon. Splitting cleanly at the bowsprit, she opened in an instant; the forehold became a seething caldron of smashing timbers, crates, bales and roaring water. The contents shot outward over the wildly heaving ocean like the particles of a disintegrating bomb, instantly lost in the blackness.

A vivid blue-white bolt of lightning split the murk with an eerie, cold radiance. The brief glare etched in startling clearness a lithe, tawny shape flung forward on the crest of a racing breaker—a spotted long-legged form which was at once swallowed in the swirling confusion about it. Blackness came again, broken at once by another jagged streak. It threw into silhouette a serrated line of wildly tossing trees and wave-swept beach upon which, even at the moment, was thrown that spotted shape; hurled through the spindrift to thud with sodden limpness upon the salt-soaked sands, to lie motionless for a long moment and then rise and struggle feebly through the blackness toward the reeling trees. . . .

The feeding buck jerked his head upright and stared intently at the wall of jungle behind him. Although it was very still and nothing moved about the grassy flat, some inner prompting had given a subtle warning of intangible danger. His quick alarm subsided as suddenly as it came, however, and he dropped his head again to the

succulent herbage at his feet. Perhaps five minutes passed; then a puff of air brought another strange jerking of the buck's antlered head. This time he did not hesitate, but sprang into the air with a long bound, soared lightly upward, touched the grass many yards away and stretched out in a dead run—a beautiful display of graceful speed.

Hard upon his heels, flashing low, its limbs working with the smooth precision of driving pistons, came a long tawny shape—a streak, a blur, which seemed to skim the grass tops like a fleeting golden shadow. The gap between the buck and his pursuer lessened with amazing rapidity. It was evident that the former was doing his best; his head was thrown back, his antlers lying along his back while the slender hoofs drummed a steady tattoo upon the matted growth. He neared a line of low dunes, sped across them with a scarcely perceptible break in his stride and leaped out upon the hard-packed sands of the ocean beach. Swinging parallel to the dunes, he lengthened the magnificent gait once more, and the thunder of his hoofs became an uninterrupted roll, like that of a muffled drum.

From that low, running shape following, there came no sound. In utter silence the hurtling, tawny machine of speed ate up the distance. It was thrilling, that wonderful exhibition of animal speed; it was magnificent in its setting of sand and sea. The gap lessened from many yards to a few feet and then, in a splendid burst, the pursuer launched into the air.

Fairly upon the back of the buck crashed the golden doom; the victim staggered under the impact, swerved violently and plunged headlong to the sand. A brief struggle followed. Then the victor raised himself, planted his forefeet upon the carcass and stared outward over the incoming surf.

Standing there in the clear sunlight, every detail of his appearance was outlined against the background of the

dunes. Long and rangy, but trim and swift, he was over six feet in length; there was in his looks a suggestion strongly reminiscent of both dog and cat; a peculiar combination utterly strange and exotic.

Of a golden fawn color above, and lighter beneath, he was everywhere marked with black spots, evenly distributed over body and legs. These last were remarkably long and slender, and the claws were neither wholly cat-like nor yet those of a dog, for they were partly retractile. His tail was long and the head rather small and rounded. Altogether, he was as foreign an animal as could well be imagined for the beach of a low-country barrier island. Lurus was, in fact, a cheetah—the hunting leopard of Africa and India.

His presence on Kiawato Island, while surprising enough, was easily explained. One of a number of animals consigned to the zoological park of a city on the Atlantic seaboard, he had been a passenger on the schooner which had run into a hurricane offshore, and after a losing battle amid the Gulf Stream, had gone to pieces on a sandy reef of the low-lying coast line. Lurus was the sole survivor. It had been late the day after when he awoke from the semi-stupor which had claimed him after his wild ride through the surf that tempestuous night; refreshed but ravenous, he had caught sight of the buck feeding on the flat.

After the slaughter the cheetah fell upon the venison with relish and ate until replete. Then he walked slowly up the beach.

The place fascinated him strangely. Utterly unlike his native home of widely reaching plains, dotted with scattered flat-topped trees, this stretch of open sand, bordered by the dense vegetation of the island on one side and the limitless waters on the other, was so totally new as to be a source of wonder. He saw many evidences of the storm as he went; dead sea-birds lay everywhere and wreckage littered the sands.

For a day or two he remained close to the beach, finding that little effort was necessary to make a meal; but it was not long until a desire to see more of this strange place forced itself upon him; he forthwith plunged into the jungle and made his way inland.

Kiawato Island, one of a long chain stretching along the coast, was a large one. Though somewhat narrow, it was fully ten miles long and much of it was covered with a dense growth of pine, live-oak and palmetto. Back from the sea-beach were open areas of rank grass, quite flat and extending over to the back beach which was only a narrow strip of muddy sand, fringed with oyster banks and bordering a vast expanse of salt marsh reaching out toward the mainland some three miles away.

WHILE he had remained upon the beach Lurus had seen little of the inhabitants of this new land. It was not long after he penetrated the jungle, however, that he began to catch glimpses of the various dwellers there, each and every one being as new to him as were their surroundings. Slipping silently through the thickets—wondering at the height of the towering pines and swaying banners of moss which draped them—he rounded a thick clump of cassina to come out on the shores of a still lagoon, rimmed about by palmettos. Busily engaged in some intricate operation at the water's edge was a big raccoon.

Lurus stopped short about a dozen yards distant and gazed at it in interested wonder. A vagrant puff of breeze wafted a strange scent to the 'coon's nostrils, and wheeling suddenly, it saw the tawny form standing near. In amazed wonder the startled animal stood stiff-legged and ready, a low growl rumbling in its chest. As wise

as this old 'coon was in the lore of the low-country woods, as many years as it had lived upon Kiawato, it had never seen such an animal before. Its cunning eyes blazed with interest and its shrewd wrinkled visage was askew with surprise, not unmixed with trepidation—for the stranger's appearance was not at all reassuring. For a moment or two the tableau remained statuesque; then the cheetah took a step forward.

Instantly the 'coon crouched; its fur ruffled and the darkly ringed tail stood out straight behind it; a greenish glare came into its intelligent eyes while its thin lips wrinkled back from sharp teeth in a harsh snarl. The purport of that snarl was unmistakable. Lurus stopped again and eyed the 'coon intently. It seemed very small and rather insignificant, but since Lurus was full-fed and tolerant, he had no desire to force an issue. After some few moments of staring he turned slowly and walked off down the shores of the lagoon. The 'coon's fur sank softly downward, the green glare left its eyes, and forgetting its occupation of a few minutes before, it gazed after the retreating form of the cheetah, then whirled about and ambled swiftly off among the thickets.

LURUS, meanwhile, had forgotten the 'coon in the seeing of other sights. Life was abundantly evident here; near one end of the lagoon a number of big, bareheaded wood ibises were stalking about the shallows, darting heavy beaks downward and stirring up the water with their feet. Smaller and more graceful herons, both white and blue, paced here and there; a huge white-headed eagle sat motionless upon the top of a lightning-blasted pine and a noisy kingfisher plunged into the water to rise with a harshly rattling cry of triumph at the success of its dive. Out near the center of the still expanse were what seemed to be several black logs, curiously knobbed and plated—immovable and silent, but invested with a sinister yet intangible sense of danger. Lurus knew that they were not logs. He had seen crocodiles in his native home and though these were alligators and not crocodiles, it made little difference to him; he knew that they were dangerous, but they were the one familiar note in this new country he was investigating.

Halfway round the lagoon he was startled by a sudden whirring noise among the grasses at his side. In instinctive alarm he leaped nimbly aside and mounting a log gazed over the grass tops at a compact, lustrous mound of symmetrical coils, at the center of which lay a hideous, flattened head with two black glittering eyes staring into his. Behind this head a rapidly vibrating tail gave forth that ominous whirring note and while the cheetah did not know he was looking at a rattlesnake, he felt that here was something to avoid. He dropped off the log and circling the grass patch at a safe distance, left that lethal noise behind.

As he stopped a moment and looked out over the water another noise smote his ears. A soft faint noise it was, but he whirled about and watched the trees. Sinking to his belly he saw, coming down a cable-like vine near by, a chunky gray-and-white animal with a long tail. The wood rat, making for the lagoon to drink, did not see that spotted form blending so perfectly with the sun-dappled, shadow-marked ground, and on the short trip from the vine to the water, never saw the doom which smote it. A golden streak flashed through the air, the swift blow of an armored paw smashed the unsuspecting rodent into the wet sand at the water's edge—and Lurus had made his second kill of the dwellers of Kiawato Island. It was a small morsel at best, but he relished it. While he made his meal unhurriedly, he began to realize that he was going to like this island.

As the days went by this feeling increased. Never had he found better hunting, even on his African plains. Clumsy marsh hens, feeding along the back beach, fell easy victims to his lightning pounce; big bronzed turkeys, scratching in the pine needles, were royal game, and satisfying meals. The brown marsh rabbits which swarmed about the undergrowth were but practice for his tremendous powers of speed. The whole island population of fur and feather realized that a new and swift killer had appeared among them. This golden, spotted stranger, so silent, so amazingly agile, appearing from nowhere and wreaking such havoc among them, was a danger which overshadowed every one.

To Lurus there was one form of hunting which appealed with much greater force than all the rest. The island, like others in the low-country barrier chain, abounded in deer. The graceful animals literally swarmed in suitable localities, and Kiawato Island was a favorite haunt. They reminded Lurus forcibly of the antelope of his native plains, and he never tired of stalking a feeding buck or doe; when the animal sighted or winded him and burst away in arrowy flight, he gloried in the breathless chase, the whistling rush of air about his speeding form, and the final thrilling leap which placed him upon the shoulders of his victim.

The speed of the cheetah was truly amazing. No animal on earth could equal him in full flight, for a half mile or so, at any rate, and Lurus invariably ran his quarry down before that distance had been covered. He always used care in the preliminary stalk and saw to it that he was within safe distance before starting his rush. As fleet of foot as were the slim-legged woods-dwellers, they had no chance with that flashing tawny streak upon the trail. He took toll of them frequently and never failed to gain the keenest zest from the swift victory which ensued. Only the wide-winged ospreys which fished in the lagoon, the apathetic alligators and the old white-headed eagle seemed immune to his attacks—these and one other.

After some three weeks upon Kiawato, during which time Lurus had not met with any dweller there who was a match for him, he came to the not unnatural conclusion

that he was lord of all he surveyed. And then, one day, prowling through the forest on a tour of investigation, he came suddenly upon a small, rather insignificant animal digging busily in the mold by the roots of a big live-oak. Lurus stopped and eyed it narrowly. It was simply another new citizen which had hitherto escaped his notice. But it did not act like the other woods dwellers he had encountered. Far from it. The others, after a hasty look, had invariably taken flight; this animal saw him at once but beyond a casual and somewhat supercilious glance at him, ignored him completely.

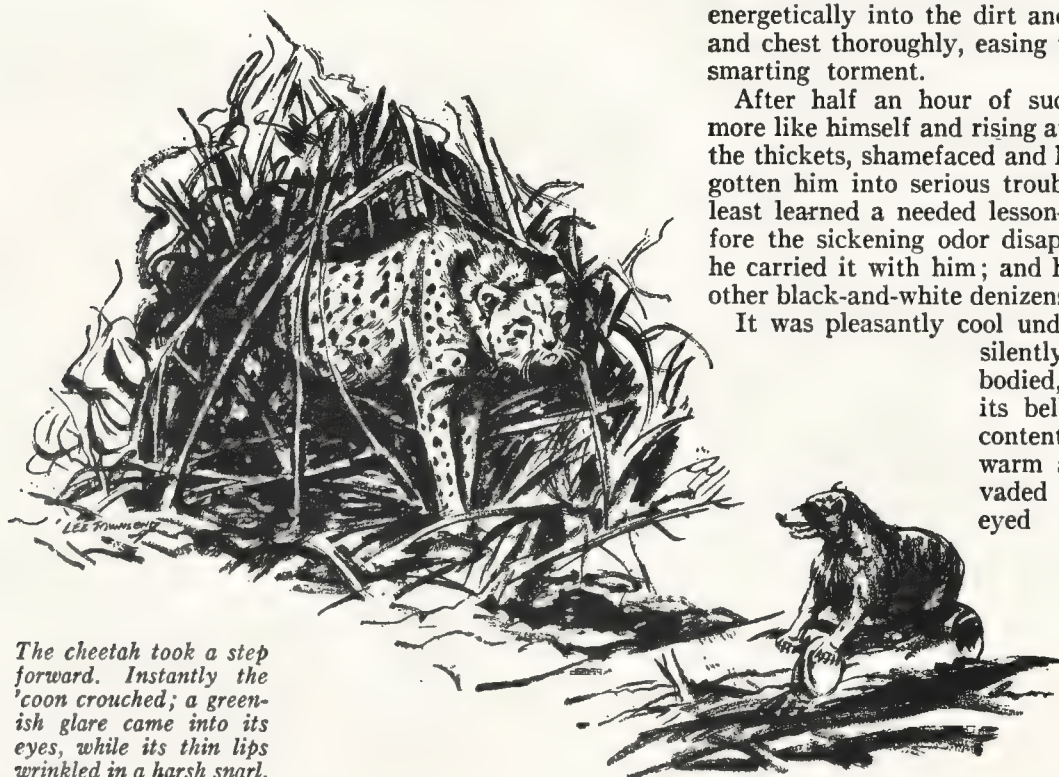
It was an affront not to be passed over. Lurus came a step nearer and growled harshly, staring at the busy digger with a growing light of anger in his round eyes. Being treated as if he were a stump was not soothing, nor yet pleasant. There was certainly nothing in the appearance of the offender which looked dangerous; it was small, not much bigger than the timid marsh rabbits; it was clothed in black fur marked with vivid white stripes running from nose to bushy tail; a most innocent-looking and somewhat handsome little fellow.

Lurus' temper flared to the surface; he was not particularly hungry, but he would teach his arrogant little beast a lesson! Crouching slightly, he growled once more and sprang quickly. Quick as he was, the other was quicker. It whirled around, away from the cheetah, its bushy tail shot up, and in an instant Lurus was smitten by a blinding, suffocating cataclysm which nearly choked him in his spring. With a gasping snarl, the amazed cheetah crashed blindly to earth and whirled over and over in a paroxysm of choking coughs while the skunk, paying him not the slightest heed, ambled methodically away beneath the spreading live oaks.

It was several moments before the dazed Lurus could draw a full breath. Then, in frantic, unreasoning trepidation he crashed off through the bushes in a vain endeavor to get away from that choking horror. It was useless; he threw himself to the ground and writhed in impotent fury and alarm. In doing this he found the best antidote, for immediate relief was experienced by such contact with the soil. Sensing this, he burrowed energetically into the dirt and leaves, scrubbing his head and chest thoroughly, easing to a considerable degree the smarting torment.

After half an hour of such treatment he felt much more like himself and rising at last, sneaked away through the thickets, shamefaced and humiliated. His temper had gotten him into serious trouble this time, but he had at least learned a needed lesson—for it was many days before the sickening odor disappeared. Wherever he went he carried it with him; and he kept a vigilant watch for other black-and-white denizens of the jungle. . . .

It was pleasantly cool under the myrtles and slipping silently into the shades, a long-bodied, gray-furred animal sank to its belly, closing its eyes in slow contentment. Outside it was very warm and still; a lazy quiet pervaded the jungle until a beady-eyed chickadee, hopping about among the leaves, caught sight of the newcomer and instantly set up a high-pitched "dee-dee-dee" which split the silence sharply. Finding that the object of its alarm took no notice of the notes, the tiny bird dropped lower



The cheetah took a step forward. Instantly the 'coon crouched; a greenish glare came into its eyes, while its thin lips wrinkled in a harsh snarl.

and surveyed the still form with a continued audible curiosity.

The occupant of the cool shade was good to look at. Clothed in soft gray fur, his sides spotted with numerous blackish markings, his head large and rounded, he looked very capable even in repose. His ears were penciled with a fine tuft of black hairs and they twitched slightly as the wandering insects hummed about him; occasionally his eyes opened, great silvery orbs which were as bright as hammered silver. A ludicrously short tail, as though in sympathy with his ears, jerked quickly now and then, while large padded feet, inert and quiet now, gave an accurate idea to his fighting abilities, for they were armed with long, keen-edged talons. Longclaw was a Bay lynx, a low-country wildcat.

Even in the coast country, where wildcats are sometimes very large, Longclaw was a big animal. His weight would have been at least fifty pounds and his body, without an ounce of fat, was as supple and muscular as years of hunting and exercise could make it. Longclaw had come far that day and he was tired. Addicted to periods of roving, he had just returned to the barrier island after an extended tour of the mainland behind the marshes, having been away for weeks. Though he had found the hunting fair, the country had palled on him at length and feeling the call of the jungle by the sea, he had journeyed toward it for the past few days—leisurely at first, then with growing impatience. And now he was home once more; as the afternoon wore on, he slept peacefully in the myrtle thicket while the never-ceasing drone of the surf on the outer beach sounded faintly about his leafy covert. . . .

Longclaw had not been many days upon Kiawato, however, before he realized that all was not as it had been. He sensed a difference in the attitude and behavior of the denizens of the jungle; he had never known the time when he had to exercise such care and stealth in his hunting, he had never known the wild kindred so keenly alert and vigilant. His capture of a marsh rabbit on the evening of his return had been perfectly normal hunting, but it was the only instance of it which had occurred since that night. He took but little notice of it for a time, then he began to wonder. Instead of a transitory condition which passed quickly, it rather increased and grew more pronounced. Longclaw ranged the woods in vain for a solution to the problem.

Proceeding one afternoon down the back beach near one of the narrow inlets, he came to a tangled mass of debris at the edge of the marsh and in skirting it, saw a puddle of feathers on the ground which had once adorned a marsh hen. The soil about them was trampled and bore stains of blood, while clearly imprinted on all sides were many footprints. It was at these that Longclaw nosed in wonder and as he nosed he growled softly, an involuntary rumble of angry doubt. With minute attention he sniffed the silent telltale marks strongly and growled again, on a louder, harsher note. Jerking his head upward, he stared about him with piercing intensity as if half expecting the mysterious maker of the footprints to be lurking near. There was something vaguely familiar about the scent which yet clung to the marks; it was one which had never assailed his nostrils before, but it was not entirely strange. That it was characteristic of the cat tribe he knew instinctively, but it was of no cat of the low country.

Then, in an instant, the thing became clear. Here was the reason for the unwonted wariness of the island kindred; here was the reason for the scanty results of his hunting the past few days. There was another here, hunting and killing his lawful prey, his own sustenance. As these impressions flitted through his brain Longclaw's

blood ran hot with rage; he snarled harshly, sinking to the ground, his tail twitching nervously.

From that moment the old wildcat was consumed with a wild impatience to see this stranger, mingled with a growing hate of its existence. He ranged far and wide the next day but was no nearer to the solution of the mystery than before. On the afternoon of the following day he came out of the jungle to the edge of a grass-grown flat midway between the front and back beaches. The area was rimmed about by the forest growth and constituted one of his favorite places for the hunt. He was tired now and ready for a rest, so he turned toward a huge windfallen tree



lying near, its shattered head projecting some hundred feet into the grassy open. Walking down the trunk, Longclaw crept

in among the bare branches at the end and stretched himself out along the weathered timber, staring out over the scene before him.

Nothing moved out there except a circling willet, wheeling over the flat on black and white wings and uttering its shrilly complaining cry. A woodpecker drummed hollowly upon a dead limb back in the jungle and the droning hum of insects mingled with the steady muffled boom of the distant surf. Half an hour passed and a movement near the wood's edge caught the wildcat's eyes. He raised his head to see a young doe emerge from the screening greenery and step daintily out into the open, beginning at once to crop the luxuriant grasses. Though some distance away, she was headed toward the windfall; Longclaw dropped his head and gazed eagerly and expectantly at the animal's slow progress in his direction.

His luck seemed to have turned. Here was a grand chance! His mouth watered. The deer fed quietly for some minutes, then suddenly jerked her head around, stared at the woods, and broke into a quick trot which increased to a run. Straight toward the windfall she came; intent only upon making a kill, Longclaw dropped from the trunk and crouched in the long grasses. Hardly had

he tensed his muscles than the doe loomed in his face; he sprang instantly, his fifty pounds of bone and sinew striking the deer full upon the shoulder and hurling her to the ground. One quick grab of his jaws and the grasses about the struggling forms reddened in a growing stain.

A sudden rustling of the grass smote Longclaw's ears; he raised his head to whirl about and see a golden, black-spotted form leave the ground in a silent leap and flash toward him without a sound. In utter amazement the wildcat dodged instinctively and with a throaty growl, the newcomer struck the grasses and darted toward him. Even in the rush of events, Longclaw realized that he was face to face with death. Unknown to each other, both he and the stranger had been intent upon the doe's undoing.

Lurus was consumed with rage at the interruption to his hunt; he was actually robbed of his prey by this presumptuous animal before him! The result was inevitable. The lynx eyed with venomous hatred the strange apparition before him; though he was impressed even in that moment by the other's size, he knew that to fight was his sole chance—it was too late to retreat. They came together in a snarling, twisting mass.

Longclaw reached instantly for the cheetah's throat, but Lurus saved



The lynx eyed with hatred the strange apparition before him; he knew that to fight was his sole chance.

himself by a convulsive jerk and swept a forepaw around in a swinging smash. It landed heavily on the shoulder of the lynx while the latter's jaws closed about Lurus' other foreleg. As Longclaw shook him savagely, Lurus smote once more and long red furrows leaped into being on the gray fur of the smaller animal. The blow loosened the lynx's hold; the cheetah jerked away, rolled over twice and leaped to his feet. The lynx crouched flat, eyes glaring, ears twitching, a picture of indomitable, fighting rage. Lurus tensed momentarily, staring at the cat in growing wonder and alarm. This animal did not run from him!

He had little time for speculation, however, for the cat, now wild with rage and cornered completely, left the ground in a silent streak. Crouching slightly, the cheetah dodged and struck as he did so. The blow smashed against Longclaw's flank, and threw him sideways. Realizing his advantage, Lurus darted in, but closed on empty air, for Longclaw, twisting in his fall, whirled like an uncoiled spring and once more darted for his antagonist's throat.

Over both crashed, in a biting, clawing tangle, struck the grass and rolled there in an inextricable mass, while teeth and claws raked and tore savagely; then they leaped apart again.

Hardly had they separated than Longclaw bounded upward, while Lurus became entangled in the legs of the doe in rising, and stumbled. Once, twice, the armored paws of the wildcat struck; long red gashes appeared in the golden hide before him as with a hoarse growl Lurus twisted free and leaped for Longclaw's side. The unexpected maneuver was entirely successful; he closed about the cat's flank and bit in deeply while he got in blow after blow with his paws. Had they been equipped like the lynx's, the issue would have been decided then and there, but his claws did not possess the rending power necessary for his need.

Crouched low as Lurus was, Longclaw could only snap at him in hurried grabs—he could not reach the neck—and unable to stand the punishment longer, he tore away, blood streaming from his hindquarters. Lurus followed closely, intent upon his advantage; as he reared upward, Longclaw saw his chance. Straight at the cheetah's side he drove, dodged quickly and with an incredibly swift movement, threw himself sideways. He struck the long-legged Lurus full upon the flank and whirled beneath him, closing his jaws upon his antagonist's chest in a fierce grip and whipping both hind legs under his body. Pulling Lurus downward, he slashed at his unprotected belly with razor-

like claws; like flashing pistons his hind legs moved forward and backward, faster and faster, the knife-edged weapons ripping their way through muscles and tendons in eviscerating swiftness. A choked scream rang out as the tortured cheetah twisted, squirmed and writhed in an effort to dislodge

the clinging weight below which was tearing out his vitals; larger, taller and heavier though he was, he found himself at a frightful disadvantage, for the machine of death under him was untouchable. Nowhere could he gain a grip upon the wildcat, though he fought with heroic endeavor for an opening. It was useless; those mighty claws, driven by whipcord muscles, were cutting him into ribbons.

One last gasping scream burst from him as his brain reeled under the awful punishment and he sank in a collapsing heap upon the body of his destroyer. Heaving him aside, Longclaw lay motionless for a moment, his breath whistling, eyes glaring and flanks rising and falling painfully. Then he struggled slowly to his feet, a drenched and sanguinary spectacle; deep gashes marked his gray sides, one ear was slit and dangling and his left foreleg was bitten nearly through. Sorely injured, but with the light of battle yet flaring in his eyes, the lynx stared down at the lacerated shape of his victim as if ready to leap once more. But the red-splashed form did not move; Longclaw raised his head and gave a single victorious scream.

When the hours of darkness came, the little meadow mice and shrews, coming from their snug retreats under the grass roots, gazed in silent wonder at the golden stranger lying there, so deeply marked with red. But as morning dawned, the wide-winged vultures of the skies wheeled ever lower toward the flat, their sable pinions beating out a rustling requiem of death.



The Mills of God

IV—THE CLUE OF THE SILVER SPUR

By George Barton

Illustrated by Vladimir Cherkoff

"JEAN," cried the little old lady in the lace cap and dark dress, "I want you to do me a favor."

The bluff old Frenchman looked at his wife with a smile of tenderness in his eyes, and said with unwonted feeling:

"In all the years we have been married I have never refused you anything, *ma chérie*. What do you wish?"

It was in Paris in the fall of 1796; the dull sky and chill air seemed to add to the low spirits and the depression of the old lady. She spoke now with great earnestness:

"You have been the courier of the Lyons mail for many years, but there has never been a night when you started on that dangerous journey that I have not been filled with misgivings. Possibly these were foolish fears, but I have a premonition that if you undertake it again you will never come back alive. I want you to sell the business—and sell it at once. We have a competence now, and there is no good reason why we should not spend the declining years of our lives in peace and happiness. Do what I ask you—and make me happy!"

John Joseph Excoffon had heard this plea before and had been giving it serious consideration. At that very moment he had an offer for the route and now, moved by the emotion and the foreboding of his faithful helpmate, he decided to sell his business. In less than two hours after the conversation with his wife he had a meeting with his prospective purchaser and the matter was settled to their mutual satisfaction.

The service which Excoffon had carried on for the greater part of his life had been established during the reign of Louis XI. The couriers originally traveled only with royal messages. Afterward they carried letters of princes; finally the mail was extended as a service for ordinary people. The old courier had enjoyed it in spite of its hazardous nature and parted with it with actual reluctance. He came back that afternoon to inform his wife that he had at length complied with her request. She was overjoyed with the news; she embraced him and

kissed him with enthusiasm. "Now," she said, "we may become lovers again as we were in the early days of our marriage."

They were sitting in the twilight making plans for the future when there came a loud knock at the door. It seemed like the knock of Fate to the old lady, but her husband answered it cheerfully. The caller proved to be the man who had just bought the route. Something unexpected had happened which made it necessary for him to spend the night in Paris, and he asked Monsieur Excoffon if, as a special favor, he would not take charge of the Lyons mail for that one night.

"It will be the last time," he urged, "and after that you may enjoy your well-earned leisure to your heart's content."

The good-natured Excoffon readily agreed, particularly as he had some odds and ends of jewelry of his own which he knew could be disposed of to advantage in the city of Lyons. Madame Excoffon overheard the conversation between the two men, and her heart was heavy. But she knew argument would be useless, so she resigned herself to the inevitable with the best grace possible.

The courier had some shopping to do and after that he and his son dined together in a restaurant in the Rue de la Jussienne. The son, who resembled his mother, also felt the apprehension to which she had given voice. Like her, he had a conviction that coming events cast their shadows before. While they were seated in the café he noticed two men at an adjoining table, and he had an uncanny feeling that in some way or other they were to be connected with this final journey of his father. One of them had fair hair and shifty eyes, and was wearing a blue coat. Whenever the boy looked in his direction this man awkwardly averted his gaze.

The father and son went to the courtyard of the post-office building where the horses and coach, fully equipped, were waiting to start on the trip to Lyons. A man stood there waiting to see the courier. He said that he wanted to engage passage to the French city, and he was accommodated at once.

As the son bade his father an affectionate farewell, he gave a start of alarm—the lone passenger was one of the men he had seen in the restaurant!

Young Excoffon was disturbed, but refrained from burdening his father with his fears. After all it might only be a foolish thought, due to too much brooding upon the dangers which lay in the route of the coach. . . .

Before starting, the courier looked at his passenger and noticed he was carrying an unusually large saber.

"Well, my friend," said Excoffon, "you seem to be fully armed."

The man grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"The roads," continued the courier, "are not any too safe—but with my well-loaded pistols and your sword we can easily defend ourselves if we are attacked."

The passenger, who gave his name as Laborde, was curious about the details of the journey and asked many questions which were answered with animation by Monsieur Excoffon. Laborde seemed to be amused at the post-boy who, we are told, "sat firm and square in his seat, shod with high boots, wearing a tightly fitting and embroidered jacket, with a hat of American cloth on his head. At irregular intervals he noisily cracked his whip—this rather from force of habit than from a necessity of stimulating the ardor of his courageous team."

Presently the forest of Senart hove into sight and the coach entered its silence and gloom. Conversation ceased and the courier and his post-boy became intent upon their work. The only sound was the jingling of the bells on the spirited horses. On and on they went with the overshadowing trees forming an archway around them. The passenger was engrossed in his own thoughts.

Suddenly from out of the silence of the forest came the shrill notes of a whistle.

The unexpectedness of it startled the courier. The coach was halted; then the piercing notes of the whistle were followed by the sound of pistol-shots. . . .

At daybreak the next morning some peasants coming through that part of the woods discovered the bodies of the honest courier and his gayly decorated post-boy, covered with blood. One horse had been killed and the other stolen. All of the money and jewels were gone.

Methods of communication in France at that time were far from being what they are today, but in a surprisingly short time news of the foul murders reached every part of the country and aroused intense indignation. Police from Paris joined the local officers in trying to locate and arrest the assassins.

The first clue—and a highly important one it proved to be—was a silver spur, which was found on the ground only a few yards away from the murdered man. The curious part of it was that the assassins should have left such a damning bit of evidence behind them. Obviously the deed had been carefully planned and Laborde, the passenger with the saber, had counted upon being joined at this particular spot in the woods by his fellow-conspirators. The only explanation of their carelessness in leaving the spur was that it was dark and they were unaware it had fallen to the ground.

The first news of any importance in the search which was instituted by the police came from the innkeeper at Lieursaint. He was visibly excited when he heard of the double murder, and he told his story with many gesticulations.

"It was about six o'clock on the night of the crime," he said, "when I was standing at the doorway of the inn taking my usual smoke. I heard loud sounds in the distance and presently four horsemen came galloping up to my place. One of the horses was marked by a pronounced yellow stripe. The men were greatly disturbed and had evidently been riding hard and fast. One of them wore a blue coat and used a pair of silver spurs. He said to me:

"'Has the mail coach for Lyons passed this place?'

"'No,' I answered, 'it will be some time before it passes this point.'

"He discovered then that one of his spurs had become undone during the course of his ride, and he came inside and tried to fix it. But he was not successful and seeing the servant-girl watching him intently he called to her to get some thread and help him with the job. As a

matter of fact, she did it by herself. He thanked her and gave her a tip. But like myself, she felt that there was something suspicious about the agitation and the strange actions of the man. Both of us are convinced now that this man was concerned in the murder of the courier. My wife watched the man also and she shares our belief."

The innkeeper was able to give a detailed description of all four men, and with this as a starting-point the police decided to round up all of the known desperate characters in and around Paris. They went after the "sewer rats" and thoroughly stirred up the disreputable quarters where crooks are wont to cluster like bats amid the dust and rubbish of the great city. As a result of that search a dozen men were arrested on suspicion. After they had been grilled and put through what we call "the third degree" all but three were released. These were named Cou-

riol, Bernard and Richard. Stephen Couriol was best known as a horse-dealer, although the horses he dealt in were no better than they should be. In some way he was associated with the horse that was marked with a yellow stripe. Couriol had been away from his lodgings for the two days covered by the robbery and murder. The man Bernard was Couriol's close friend and Richard was a well-known fence, who made a business of dealing in stolen goods. All three men were placed under lock and key.

When the three were brought up for trial the case against them was far from complete, but the French police with that innate sense of the dramatic, insisted the trial should go on, in the belief that it would lead to the complete solution of the mystery. The courtroom was crowded and when the innkeeper of Lieursaint and his wife took the stand they unhesitatingly identified Couriol and Bernard as two of the four horsemen they had seen on the day of the crime. They declared that the fair-haired man who wore the silver spurs was not among the prisoners.



As she glanced at the strange man, she trembled, then dropped in a faint.

As the trial proceeded, a shabbily dressed man caused some commotion at the entrance to the room by insisting upon getting in to view the proceedings. He frantically shoved and elbowed his way through the crowd until in sheer disgust they opened a lane and permitted him to take a seat on the first row of the benches facing the judge and witnesses. One of the *gendarmes* recognized him as a chap who had been hovering around the prisoners ever since they had been escorted into the dock. The officer shrugged as he glanced at the insistent spectator. "Some people," said the *gendarme* deprecatingly, "are so morbid that they cannot resist the desire to listen to tales of crime."

INDEED this man watched and listened with all his faculties. His eyes were strained and his ears alert to catch every word that was being said by the witnesses. No man in the gallery of a theater watching the unfolding of a drama could have been more absorbed. He was thirsty for information and literally drank in every syllable that was uttered. When the servant-girl from the inn at Lieursaint stepped to the stand the interest of this spectator became almost painfully acute. His hands worked convulsively and his face was drawn.

The girl took the stand calmly enough; beyond a natural shyness in finding herself in such an unusual position she seemed quite self-possessed. But as she turned she happened to glance at the strange man in the first row of spectators. Then a peculiar thing happened: She trembled, her lips became white and she began to sway uncertainly. She clutched the edge of the stand with one hand to support herself, and with the other pointed directly at this person who was watching the proceedings so tensely. The next moment she dropped to the floor in a dead faint.

The man, uneasy at the attention he was attracting, rose from his seat and began to wedge his way out toward the aisle. Almost blindly he pushed through the crowd. Some one among the spectators cried out excitedly:

"Don't let that man get away—don't let him get away!"

By this time the fellow was nearing the end of the room. In the midst of the excitement the judge finally realized what was going on and in a stern voice shouted: "Arrest that man and bring him before the court!"

The order was obeyed and as the erstwhile spectator—who had suddenly become a part of the play—sat there with eyes cast down, the judge questioned him:

"What is your name?"

"Joseph Lesurques," was the sullen reply.

"What are you doing here?"

"Just listening to this trial."

"Do you know the girl who has just fainted?"

"No," was the dogged retort. "I never saw her before in my life."

"Please explain why she should become so agitated at the sight of you?"

"How should I know?" cried Lesurques peevishly. "You might as well ask the same question of anyone else in the courtroom."

The judge was plainly dissatisfied with the answers that were given to his questions and he directed the *gendarmes* to hold the man until the reappearance of the witness. It was fifteen minutes before she revived and was sufficiently recovered to return to the courtroom. When she took the stand her face was as white as snow and she still trembled. Her first look was in the direction of the place where Lesurques had been seated. Presently her eyes roved around the room and when she discovered him inside the rail of the court, a shudder shook her. The judge spoke kindly to her:

"Now my child, do not be frightened. Please answer my questions frankly, and in doing so remember that you are under oath."

She nodded her head.

"Do you know this man?" asked the judge, pointing at Lesurques.

"I have seen him before," she replied.

"Tell me when and where."

"He is the man I saw on the day the courier of the Lyons mail was murdered. He is the man for whom I fastened the silver spur. He is the murderer of Monsieur Excoffon!"

The crowd in the room moved threateningly in the direction of the man who had been branded a murderer. For a time it looked as though lynch law were to be attempted in a French court. But the judge rapped lustily on his desk for order, the *gendarmes* surrounded the accused and the trial was resumed in orderly fashion.

Asked to speak in his own behalf, Lesurques vehemently declared that he had not been out of Paris on the day of the murder. He said that he could prove that he did not kill the courier and the post-boy and insisted that he had been attracted to the trial merely out of curiosity. The judge listened in silence to this harangue and then called the innkeeper as a witness.

"Please remember that you are under oath," he cautioned, "and that the life of a man may depend upon what you say. Did you ever see this person before?"

"Yes," was the unhesitating reply. "I positively identify him as one of the four men who came to my place on horseback on the evening just before the double murder was committed."

No amount of cross-questioning could make him change his testimony; then his wife took the stand and confirmed all that had been said by her husband and the servant-girl.

THERE was a buzz in the courtroom when the judge called the name of Maurice Excoffon. A young man dressed in black slowly advanced to the tribunal and prepared for questioning. It was the bereaved son of the slain courier.

"Yes," he said in a low and mournful tone, "I recognize this man. How could I ever forget that face? On that day when my father started on his last journey, I dined with him at a restaurant in the Rue de la Jussienne. There were two men seated at an adjoining table. They watched us closely and conversed in whispers. I noted this at the time and have often thought of it since. One of them was Laborde and the other is the man who now stands before me. I swear that he is the very man I saw the afternoon of the day on which my dear father was foully murdered."

Lesurques arose, pale but composed. He realized the predicament in which he found himself, but he summoned all of his will-power to his aid, as he cried:

"Your Honor, I insist that this is a case of mistaken identity. I was in Paris on the day that this double murder occurred."

"But how can you prove it?" asked the judge.

"In many ways, but particularly because I went to a jeweler's on that day to purchase a piece of jewelry for my sweetheart."

The trial was halted in order that proof of this assertion might be brought before the court. The prisoner said he had made the purchase in the shop of a merchant named Legrand. Legrand recalled Lesurques and agreed that he had bought the jewelry as he claimed.

"But," said the officer of the court, "if such a sale was made, you must have some record of it on your books."

"Most assuredly," was the response and at once the sales-

book was produced. There in black and white was the statement that the precise article of jewelry had been sold to Lesurques on the day in question.

But on glancing at the record again, the investigator noticed that the book had been tampered with. By means of a magnifying-glass it was demonstrated that the old date had been scratched out and a new one inserted.

So Lesurques' alibi was smashed!

But he was a determined man and he was fighting for his life; he now staked everything on the assertion that he had a double and that it was this man who was guilty of the murder. Moreover he expressed his willingness to produce the double. This was a man named Dubosc, a criminal who was behind the bars.

Dubosc was brought from prison and told his story. He was a cringing sort of person who related his yarn with much halting and stammering. He did bear a slight resemblance to Lesurques, and this caused the judge to weigh his tale with extreme care.

It might be asked why should a man voluntarily confess to a crime which surely meant the loss of his own life, if he were actually guilty, but one answer to this question is that Dubosc was already under sentence of death for another crime of which he had been convicted.

The judge, however, refused to believe the story of the criminal, and Lesurques and his accomplices were convicted. Even after he went to prison the man refused to give up his fight for life. He wrote petitions and engaged lawyers to bring up technicalities to postpone his execution. As a result of this Paris became divided into two camps, those who thought Lesurques and his companions should be guillotined and those who felt that he was the innocent victim of a fatal resemblance.

In the meantime the police were still hunting for Laborde, the man with the large saber, the man in the blue coat who had been a passenger in the Lyons mail on that fatal day when Monsieur Excoffon started on his last journey in this life. The *gendarmes* and the detectives had literally fine-combed Paris and its environs in the attempts to find him. In the midst of the hubbub that had been created over the attempt to save the life of Lesurques, they found Laborde hiding in a thieves' den.

They not only arrested Laborde, but they were successful in having him make a confession of his part in the double murder in the Senart forest.

In his confession Laborde gave all of the details of the crime, from the time he followed the courier and his son into the restaurant in Paris until the double murder was executed in the dark forest.

"As agreed upon with Lesurques," he said, "I had re-

tained my place in the mail coach in advance, so as to be able surely to help him and his accomplices at the moment of the attack, for we feared a vigorous resistance on the part of the courier, whom we knew to be a brave man and always well armed. We also feared that if we let some stranger take the one inside seat—and if I hadn't taken the precaution of securing it, some other traveler certainly would have done so—he would have helped the courier energetically in defending his own life."

"We should thus have had to get rid of three people instead of two, for, of course, we could never have left such a traveler alive in possession of our secret."

After relating the details of how he had secured his passage, he went on to tell all that happened until the time they entered the lonely forest. Then he added:

"There was nobody to be seen or heard on the road. Night had fallen. One might have thought the forest deserted, when suddenly I pricked up my ears. A whistle was heard; the signal agreed upon, which I was expecting every minute. The time for doing business had come. At that moment four men on horseback dashed out of the woods, where they had been hiding. Lesurques, who came first, fired on the horses and brought one down to the ground. The coach stopped at once. Lesurques fired a pistol pointblank at the post-boy's head, sending him tumbling, dead, from the saddle. Then he jumped off his horse and came running toward me.

"At the first pistol-shot the courier had seized his pistol, crying out to me:

"We are being attacked.

Courage, my friend! There are two of us—let us defend ourselves!"

"But all he got from me was two good cuts with the saber which I was carrying, and when Lesurques sprung into the coach all he had to do was to finish him off with his pistols. Then, losing no time, we laid hands on the valuables, and all five of us got away as quickly as possible, taking with us the uninjured horse."

THE end was as dramatic as the beginning of this tale from real life. Lesurques, Laborde and the others were all guillotined in the presence of a great crowd of Parisians. . . .

It has been more than a century and a quarter since this event and it has furnished the foundations of many stories and legends. A highly romantic play was made out of it and in that version it became necessary to take poetic license with many of the facts, but the tale as it has been related here is as accurate as it has been possible to make it with the aid of the ancient records in the case.



*Some one cried excitedly:
"Don't let that man get away—
don't let him get away!"*

The Man on the Iron Gray

*Every man's hand was against
the homesteaders in the cattle-
baron country—and even the
hands of the gods.*

By BIGELOW NEAL

Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean



BUTTONHOOK JOHNSON, who got his name from his extreme length and a tendency to droop at the top like an over-ripe sunflower, glanced from the township plat in his hand to the young man looking down from a wagon seat, which in turn was perched on top of a load of lumber, boxes, and miscellaneous articles of household and farming equipment.

"For Gawd's sake, young feller, do you mean to tell me you've gone an' filed on the northwest of Seven?" he asked. And then without waiting for an answer: "Don't you know that's right on the edge of the bad-lands—right on the edge of the cattle country? It's plumb on the range of that murderin' old son-of-a-gun Bill Daily! Why, those cattlemen don't think no more of burning up a homesteader's buildings and crops than nuttin' a-tall; they'd just as soon take a shot at you as they would to go out and shoot a prairie-chicken for supper! Great Cæsar's ghost—and you're going to take that young woman into a place like that! Else everybody knows old Bill Daily's got no more use for a newcomer than a cat's got for a brindle dog."

Lloyd Conroy, fresh from the East and a stranger to the prairie and its ways, looked from the face of this ominous oracle of the West to the troubled eyes of the girl-wife at his side. He had known it was a terrifying thing to take her from the comforts and safety of a city into this iron land of pioneers; but he had thought of the hardships only and not of actual danger, until now, stopping to inquire his way, he was met by this blast of pessimistic warning. True, he had heard of wars between cattlemen and settlers; here he seemed to be in the presence of the genuine article.

On the strength of another man's word he had filed on a claim. While he knew it was on the edge of the bad-lands and so on the very borders of the settlements, he did not know that he was tempting fate by trespassing on the range of the cattle barons. But the expense of locating another claim would be far beyond his slender means

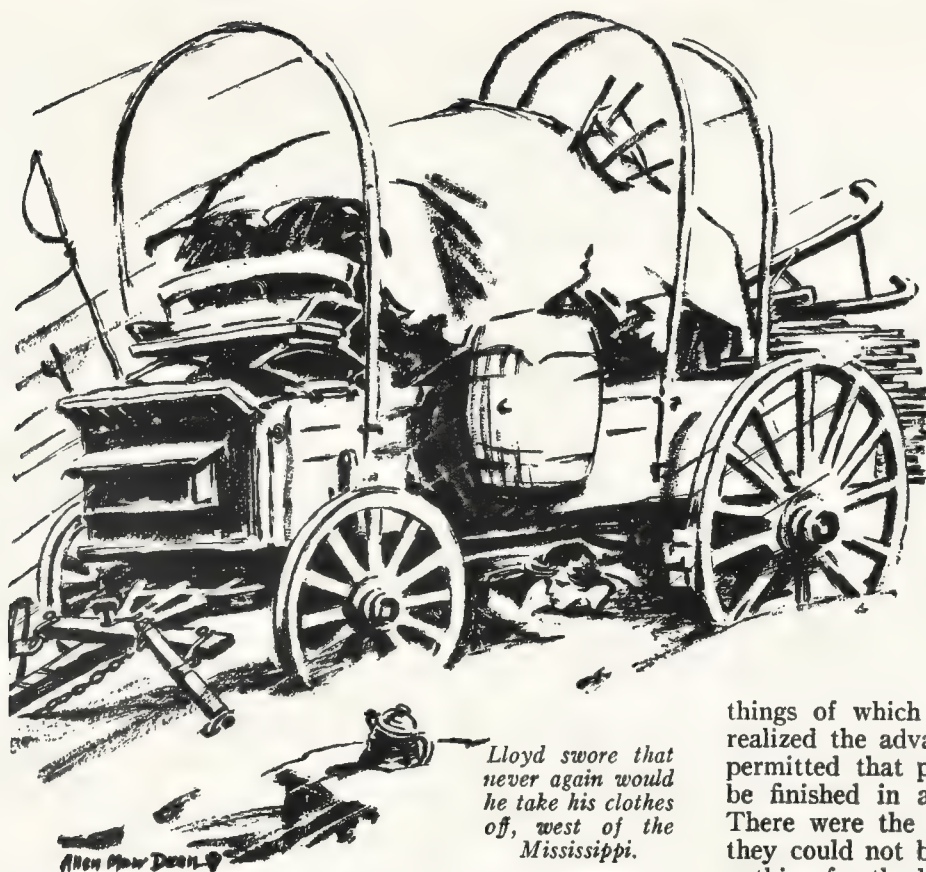
—practically every cent he and his wife had been able to save was represented either in the load of equipment in the wagon or in the two teams of horses which they had with them. To back out now meant failure and the loss of all they had; to go on—well, to go on, it seemed, might mean something even worse!

Obeying a purely masculine instinct to lean on the slenderest reed in sight, he turned to the girl at his side. "It looks, Helen, as if we were running into pretty deep water," he said. "If we go back it's all off—you know that. If we go ahead we may lose our outfit and be run out of the country besides. It's up to you: Do we turn back or do we go ahead and take a chance?"

Helen Conroy was looking off to the west. For three long, wearying days she had watched the endless horizons as they slowly rose and fell. Somewhere beyond, perhaps just over another hill to the west, she had pictured a valley, a wandering spring-fed stream with trees and flowers along its banks, a little house nestling in the shade with a snow-white rooster crowing in the yard. She visioned her husband, sunburned and strong, restored to the health that he had come West to seek.

Now, as the warning of Buttonhook Johnson reached her ears, she was looking along the road they were still to follow. For miles it stretched across the level bottom-lands, high bluffs on one side and the wide silver sheen of the river on the other; then following the river it made a great bend to the north and passed from sight leaving stretched across their path the tumultuous gray and green and red of the bad-lands, while over those threatening buttes and peaks a blue-black cloud hung against the sky, as dark and somber as the new-born fear and doubt within her soul. She realized they had reached the point where their future hung upon her courage and decision alone.

Helen Conroy possessed the spirit of the pioneers. Somewhere within her was that intangible something, which has made possible the conquering of the West.



Lloyd swore that never again would he take his clothes off, west of the Mississippi.

Slipping her hand beneath the arm of her husband she replied calmly:

"I think, Lloyd, if we intend to find our new home before night we'd better be getting on."

And they moved out again onto the prairie, followed by the words of their well-wishing adviser:

"Don't take no chances now; keep a lookout all the time, and especially for that old hellion with the grizzly hair—the man on the iron-gray!"

THE sun was just dropping behind the bad-lands when they came to the valley of Clear Creek, and Lloyd found the four square holes marking the four corners of their claim. The valley lay north and south and their claim, a half-mile square, included the bottomlands along the stream, a range of low hills on the east, and a line of age-worn clay buttes on the west—the latter a part of the bad-lands proper.

As a farming proposition, the claim was not all that it might have been. The creek cut out part of the valley floor, and a dry wash on the other side left a strip between the two of about sixty acres, all that was really adapted to the raising of crops. But there were some advantages obvious even to these inexperienced homesteaders. The creek was spring-fed, giving a plentiful supply of pure water the year round. The bluffs on the west made a natural windbreak where a windbreak was most needed, and the wide black bands drawn by Nature across the sides of the vari-colored bluffs showed the presence of lignite coal in countless tons. However, the trees Helen Conroy had pictured as part of their possessions were conspicuous by their absence. There was one great elm, battered and twisted by the elements, which supported a hawk's nest in its upper branches. Aside from the elm and several box-elders and ash, there were only a few scattered patches of chokecherries, with one cluster of buffalo-berries and wild plums hugging the hillside. The beaver dam over which the water splashed and gurgled told clearly why there were no large cottonwoods, only stumps of what had once been great trees, now charred

and blackened by prairie fires—that terror of the settlers.

At a sharp bend where the creek formed a horseshoe, enclosing a grassy point, they unloaded and began that labor which furnishes inspiration for the artists of fiction, but tries the souls of men in real life—the building of a camp.

While Lloyd was unhitching the team, the short April twilight snapped off and darkness came with a chill all the more noticeable by its contrast with the heat of the afternoon. By the time he had hobbled his horses as a precautionary measure and turned them loose, he found Helen fumbling with chilled fingers at the burner of a lantern.

Pioneering is a fascinating experience—on paper. Lloyd Conroy and his little partner had much to learn, and the greater share was about

things of which they had never dreamed. While they realized the advantages of a tent, their finances had not permitted that purchase and anyway their house would be finished in a few days. And this was springtime. There were the makings of a shack on the wagon, but they could not build a house before bedtime; there was nothing for the hopeful homesteaders to do but drape the wheels and sides of the wagon with blankets, trusting somewhat to luck but more to the storm-gods of the Dakotas.

They had planned to enjoy a campfire, but experimenting with matches taught Conroy that the prairie grass was highly inflammable, so they forbore that pleasure and comfort and instead cooked their supper over the oilstove. Then they made up their bed between the rear wheels of the wagon and crawled beneath the blankets.

Sometime in the night Conroy awoke to hear a sound like the drifting of fine sand against the wagon-box. Peering from under the blanket wall, he saw that the sky was overcast and the wind had changed to the northeast. Already the ground was gray with sleet and the blankets were beginning to belly under the pressure of the coming storm.

There was nothing he could do; he had already weighted the walls of their makeshift shelter with boxes and had nothing more which would add much in the way of protection; so he spread his sheepskin coat across the bed, lay down again and went to sleep. Toward morning he became aware of an oppressive weight on his chest and awoke to find that the sleet had ceased to hiss against their shelter. All was quiet now except for the wind, but the cold had become much greater. Thrusting forth a hand in exploration, he found the weight on his chest was caused by a snowdrift. Again he retired beneath the blankets.

With daylight the wind had increased almost to a gale; the valley lay cold and white and the snow-draped bluffs across the creek reared toward the skies like gigantic wind-carved drifts. One of the blankets had loosened from its moorings and was flapping with pistol-like reports, above the bed. The oilstove was buried in a drift, leaving nothing but the coffee-pot standing calm and serene above the snow. And Lloyd Conroy swore that never again would he take his clothes off, as long as he was west of the Mississippi!

For a third time the young homesteader retired beneath the blankets to commune with himself. He had read many books regarding life on the prairies and camping on the plains. They were all enthusiastic over the fresh, invig-

orating air that came with the dawn. They also devoted space to the delights of steaming coffee and sizzling bacon—but to the best of his recollection they had omitted certain details which would have come in mighty handy at this time. For instance, they gave no advice that would aid a man in locating his trousers in a snowdrift nor did they tell how to retrieve a sock which had blown several hundred feet into the branches of a chokecherry tree. Theoretically, he knew he should be up and doing, but practically he felt no great urge to leave the shelter of his bed. Torn between conscience and inclination, he finally decided in favor of the latter—for inasmuch as Helen still slept, it seemed unkind to disturb her. He snuggled lower in the bed.

SUCH was the welcome of Lloyd and Helen Conroy to the prairies of Dakota. It was not enough that they risk every cent they had, nor that they find themselves considered as trespassers on the lands of the cattlemen—but even the weather must prove unfriendly. New as they were to the country and its ways, alone in a strange and perhaps hostile land, the outlook was none too bright.

But for the time it proved that their fortunes had reached their lowest ebb. A little before noon the clouds broke, the wind went down and the sun came out. By night they had cleared the camp of snow and, profiting by their experience of the night before, when darkness came again they were warm and snug. As there was no danger of fire on the snow-covered prairie, that night they had a genuine campfire and by its flickering light the future took on its customary rosy hue again.

It required nearly a week to build their first residence on the northwest of Seven. A carpenter might have finished by the end of the second day, but Lloyd Conroy was not a carpenter. The shack was fourteen by fourteen feet, eight feet high at the front and six behind. The outer walls were covered with tar-paper and on the roof they used roofing-paper, which was proof against everything but hail. They could not afford a floor, so the grassy turf served as a carpet. The door was the only factory-made unit of the establishment and that lacked a lock and a doorknob. But the shack afforded protection.

With the matter of shelter disposed of for the time being and two barbed wires stretched across a bend of the creek to form a temporary pasture, the man turned his attention to the actual business of farming. He was no more a farmer than he was a carpenter, but in that respect he was not radically different from the mass of those who settled the prairie-lands of the state. Most of them were laborers from the shops and factories of the East; some were men hunting for the foot of the rainbow and a place where one need not really work to live; there was a sprinkling of those like Lloyd Conroy, who were driven to the prairies in search of health, and lastly an occasional farmer who felt the call of new opportunity. To these, pitifully few though they were, the State of Dakota owes more than it can ever repay.

It was inevitable that Lloyd Conroy should make many blunders. Aside from an occasional contact with Buttonhook Johnson, he had no source of information except the bitter school of experience. His unfitness was manifest when one morning he stood in front of his house with sixty acres of level prairie on one side and four horses, a plow, and a collection of singletrees and eveners on the other. Harnessing a team is one thing; hitching four horses to a plow in such a way that they will pull together and with the greatest efficiency is quite another. In the end Conroy and his wife figured out a system satisfactory, at least, to themselves.

Next came the problem of the eveners. Here they were

entirely at sea and a period of deep concentration followed. The result was a section of an ash tree with appropriate holes bored therein, and a pair of doubletrees fastened at either end. This odd arrangement they connected to the hitch of the plow with a clevis and it seemed they were ready for business. The rest would be easy.

Hitching up was comparatively simple except the arrangement of the lines. Conroy tried several combinations, coming to the conclusion that the only logical way was to start out and solve the problem as he went along.

In maneuvering the team to the field he made several discoveries, not all of them pleasant. Nigger, the black horse, on the right-hand side of the team, had been recommended as steady and reliable—but his natural tendency in harness did little to create confidence, for seemingly he wanted to run away with the entire outfit and failed to bring on a general smash-up only because Dolly and May, the chunky bay mares, were too fat and lazy to run. On the other side of the team was a stolid white answering to the name of Charley. It proved against Charley's principles to answer any call other than the call to feed, and he divided his time about equally between a disconcerting habit of leaning heavily on the mare next to him and walking with his hind feet outside the traces. Fortunately, the mares proved steady and gave no trouble except that Dolly's colt, cavorting gayly about, made repeated charges around and under the team, winding up with an assault that landed him in a snarl of traces and singletrees.

At last, however, they reached the end of the field and a point in line with a row of stakes and fluttering rags by which Conroy hoped to steer a direct course down the field. Here he took the plow and gave the lines to Helen.

By this time it was the middle of the forenoon. The sun, swinging high above the bluffs to the east, sent its burning rays into the little valley, causing even the hills themselves to stagger and sway while the same phenomenon of shimmering blue caught the flags from the stakes ahead, lifted some of them high in the air where they trembled and danced above the horizon. There was little motion in the air, although an occasional fitful stir gave promise of a breeze later in the day. Now hands slipped, as if greased, on the lines and the handles of the plow, and the horses had fretted themselves into a sweat.

Here the young homesteaders were beginning the realization of a dream; from this wavering, heat-baked stretch ahead, they must wrest the fruition of their hopes or go down to defeat. Somehow the actuality varied from the dream. They had dreamed of invigorating air and prairie breezes to temper the heat of noon and of the simple act of driving a plow back and forth until the sod was turned bottom-side up. Instead, the air hung like an overheated blanket, and the seemingly simple matter of plowing had assumed complications beyond their ken. Something seemed amiss with the way the team was harnessed, and they unhitched one of the horses to effect a better arrangement.

AT this point, they heard a dull monotonous sound—*A shuck-shuck, shuck-shuck*; and turning, the two at the plow saw that its origin was in a flopping slicker behind the saddle of a mounted man. He was coming directly toward them but as he rode leaning forward, palms crossed on the neck of his mount and head down so that the brim of his hat cut off the view ahead, it was evident that he had not as yet seen them.

Instinctively Helen Conroy moved a little closer to her husband and her heart, after skipping a beat or two, resumed its work with a quick heavy pound. She was terrified; this was obviously a cowboy, one of those lawless,

fearsome men against whom Buttonhook Johnson had repeatedly warned them. Nor did he look less dangerous than the description had led them to expect. He wore blue overalls tucked into high-heeled boots, a shirt of black sateen, open at the throat as if to catch every bit of moving air, a hat, whose color was a somber black and around its crown glittered the scaly skin of a rattler. His waist marked the presence of a shiny belt of cartridges and the deadly butt of a single-action revolver hung just below his right elbow.

The rider's horse suddenly snorted and stopped. Obviously he too had been asleep or nearly so. The rider, taken unaware, snapped forward in his saddle so sharply that his hat flew off and rolled over the head of his pony. Then, leaning forward, resting on his elbow against the shaggy mane, he opened his eyes, blinked against the sunlight and saw the team and plow, the man and woman, directly in his path.

Momentarily his face took on an expression of amazement; then as his eyes took in the group before him together with the tar-paper shack in the background, his expression changed. There was little of friendship in the face he turned back toward them.

Lloyd Conroy stepped forward to pick up the stranger's hat, but the rider was too quick for him. Moving his horse ahead a step, he leaned down alongside of his mount and retrieved the runaway headgear with a single motion. Erect again, he turned a lean, dark face to Conroy.

"Figgerin' on farmin' here?" he asked.

The homesteader admitted this, adding that he didn't know a great deal about farming.

"No, I guess not," commented the cowman—and after sizing up the slender arms and thin chest of the other: "Yer don't seem cut out for this kind of game at that." Then for a time conversation lagged.

Finally the puncher spoke again: "Kinder out here for yer health?"

Conroy assented.

"Farmin' in a cow country aint always as healthy as it might be," said the newcomer gruffly.

Here, then, was the first threat! Helen moved nearer to her husband and attracted by the motion, the rider's gaze shifted to her in a steady gaze that, it seemed to her, read the secret of her fear which she had been trying to hide.

But he was speaking again: "Lady's a trifle light too. Yer ought to have a Russian woman for this business. Takes a lot o' calico to go around 'em, but they're cheaper in the long run." And then with hardly a pause, and as if he had just made up his mind to a long-debated question:

"Yes, I guess ye better see the old man before ye waste any more time on this farmin' proposition."

"Whom do you mean by the 'old man'—and why should I see him?" asked Conroy.

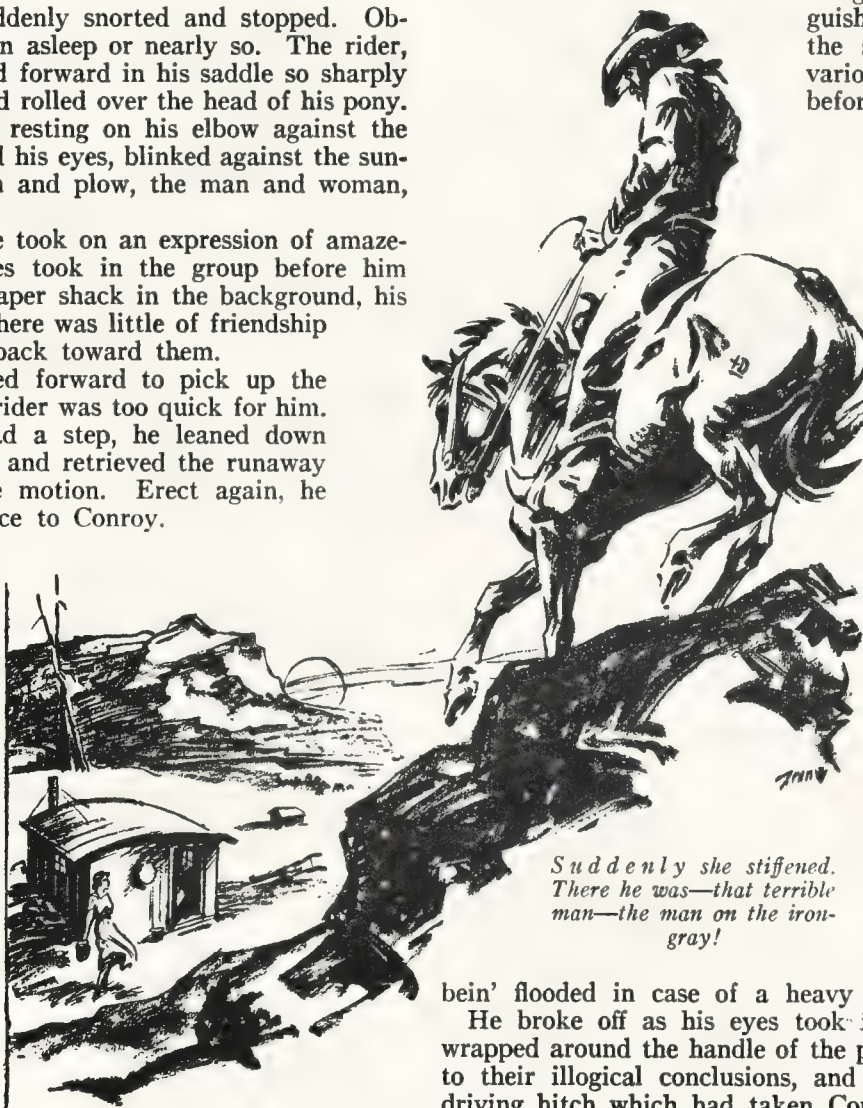
"Well, the old man's Bill Daily, an' he's been runnin' these here hills for nigh about forty years. He might have

somethin' to say about your movin' in here—an' then again he might not. Ye never can tell. But they say he's goin' away for a spell and it might save a lot o' trouble to see him before he pulls out."

It was clear to both Lloyd Conroy and his wife that this man was giving what he doubtless thought a fair warning; it was equally clear that beneath lay a thinly veiled threat of dire trouble for one who refused to heed the words of this unknown rider of the Dakota prairie.

Again conversation languished while the eyes of the stranger took in the various details of the scene before him. From a survey

of the shack he turned to the girl. Apparently something about her delicate prettiness stirred a chord of pity behind that sunburned, expressionless face. At any rate he shifted his glance to the man as he said: "If ye don't stake that shack pretty solid ye'll be comin' home some night an' find yer woman lookin' for the place where she used to live. And while ye're at it, better plow a bit clost to the wall an' pile the sod against the shack. The sod'll keep the wind from gettin' under, and the hole ye leave will act like a drain an' keep the floor from



*Suddenly she stiffened.
There he was—that terrible
man—the man on the iron-
gray!*

bein' flooded in case of a heavy rain."

He broke off as his eyes took in the tangle of lines wrapped around the handle of the plow. Following them to their illogical conclusions, and seeing the idea of a driving hitch which had taken Conroy and the girl the best part of the forenoon to figure out, he mumbled:

"Well, Jesus H. Christ!"

So softly did the words come that they did not sound at all profane; rather he appeared to be voicing a fervent prayer. Dismounting, he picked up a piece of clothesline which Helen had brought from the house with some idea that it might come in handy. With that, he passed to the front of the team and busied himself with a jack-knife. Conroy followed and watched with interest while the cowpuncher cut a piece of rope and tied the bridge bits of the two middle-center horses together, leaving just enough rope between to allow them to travel at a normal distance from each other. From the outer hame of each center horse, to the inner bit-ring of the outside members, he ran his ropes again. Unsnapping two of the lines, he threw them to one side while he took the other pair, one on each side, and snapped them into the outer bit-rings of the outside horses and passed the remaining members through the hame rings of the outer horses and so to the bits of their nearest inner neighbor.

Remounting, he accepted the thanks of the homesteader without comment, but his eyes wandered back to the girl. She sensed that this man of the West had done this in spite of his hatred of the homesteaders who were slowly but surely driving the cattlemen from the free prairies of the West.

He started on, passing toward the bad-lands. He said neither "good-by" nor "good luck"—but he did turn and across the *shuck-shuck-shuck* of his slicker his words came back, growing fainter in the distance:

"Better take my advice and see the old man. Ye may live longer and be happier if ye do. Ye'll know him when ye see him. He's the man on the iron gray."

For a time after the stranger had gone the two young pioneers stood, silently thinking. Helen was not thinking of the danger of failure. To her the thought of failure was secondary. It was a feeling of utter desolation, which gripped her. Shivers of actual fear ran up and down her spine—but she must not show it, that she knew, if she were to prove the mainstay and the support that her husband needed. . . . She gathered up her lines and turned to the waiting team.

It appeared that their trials were not over. No sooner had they sighted along the stakes and spoken to the team, than the breaking plow turned itself into a cross between the tail of a kite, and the antics of a measuring-worm in a desperate burry. Cutting a V-shaped gouge in the sod, it darted through the arc of a quarter circle, then jumped into the air, to come down and repeat itself from the other direction. By the time they had traversed a few rods, the prairie was cut and gashed by an irregular series of curved lines after the order of those used by the makers of maps to represent mountains. Exhausted from wrestling with the handles of the erratic plow, Conroy at last called a halt and drove back to the point of departure.

Lloyd Conroy knew nothing about farm machinery but he was not a fool. Applying his intelligence, a few moments of study sufficed to tell him that the trouble must lie somewhere between the hitch and the gauge-wheel. Reasoning that you must pull down on a thing to get it into the ground, he set the hitch so that the eveners would pull from the highest point. Then he loosened the nuts holding the gauge-wheel, and drove the wheel clear up against the beam.

Their next attempt was an entire contrast in the way of results. Now the plow seemed to pick out a point halfway between Hongkong and Manila; it up-ended itself and dived into the earth until nothing remained above the surface excepting the beam and the handles. Conroy went to the shack for a spade. But while perspiration was oozing from every pore, he had learned something.

ON their third attempt the plow glided smoothly beneath the surface and maintained itself on something like an even keel. But other troubles developed: First the coulter was set too high and too far back so that the sod was torn up in a ragged line, and second, Helen had become so absorbed in watching the plow that she had forgotten the team and the line of stakes. Before either novice in the art of plowing had noticed, they had plowed something which bore a striking resemblance to a question mark, on the surface of the prairie.

After dinner the Conroys temporarily abandoned the attack on the field and turned their attention to a little plot between the house and the creek which they had selected for a garden. It was here they were working when the sound of wagon-wheels caused them to look up and see Buttonhook Johnson perched high on the seat with a grin on his face like a transverse crack in an over-ripe watermelon.

Always on a second meeting, Buttonhook dropped his company manners and lapsed into his normal and informal mode of expression. One of his distinguishing characteristics lay in the fact that he almost invariably prefixed each statement with "else," and the other and perhaps the more startling, was that it made but little difference which way his breath was going, he could keep up a steady flow of words. This trait gave him a two-toned voice—that generated by the exhaust or power-stroke being loud and strong, while the words formed on the intake were a trifle squeaky. Lastly, he was past-master of an interrogative sentence; the ending of each sentence came when his voice had reached its highest point. But Buttonhook's heart was big, and in the right place.

"Else you shall have company and don't know it?" he said jovially.

THE Conroys were genuinely glad to see their only neighbor, but beyond the usual greetings they had little opportunity to speak for Buttonhook was hitting on all six. "Else we shall have a fine large day today, aint?" And allowing no time for comment: "Else I shall have brought you something?"

Disentangling his ungainly form from the seat, Buttonhook got down and took out the end-gate. Reaching, he slid out a large box.

"Six hens and a gentleman chicken," he announced tersely. "Else you shall have hen-fruit if it *never* rains?" Then waving his hand, "Else that shall be nuttin'," he replied to Helen's attempt at thanks. And reaching at the same time for another crate, "Else now we shall be in the poultry business right—aint?" And he produced three turkey hens and a wattled male of the same persuasion. Again waving aside all thanks he began pulling out sacks—allotting one word to each sack: "Potatoes—potatoes—potatoes—beans—onions—junk." The last sack they later found contained flint corn, sweet corn and garden seeds.

By that time Helen was almost in tears.

"Else what is that between neighbors?" said Johnson. It seemed there were also some sacks of feed for the fowls, some cabbages, a yellow puppy and a white kitten. Last, and most astounding of all, was a crate larger than the others and containing a Duroc sow. "Else I have a milking cow too—but it was too hot to road her so far," Buttonhook asserted. Another squirt of tobacco juice at the buffalo-grass heads. "Else you can pay me for the hog and the cow when you have the money—aint?"

And then seeing Conroy's worried look: "Else don't you should worry about nuttin'! I am staying tonight to help you to fix a pen for the hog because pretty soon there will be piglets and you'll be a stock-man right—aint?"

After putting his team in the pasture, pulling the crated sow into the shade of the house and dumping two pails of cold water over her broad back, Buttonhook turned his attention to the breaking outfit.

Here he was in his element, working with deft fingers and producing quick and positive results. Producing a four-horse evener which up to that time had been a source of perplexity to Conroy, he unhitched and rehitched the team with Dolly and May ahead and the less dependable Nigger and Charley behind. Abandoning the garden-spot as child's play, he drove to the end of the larger field. Here he looped the lines, spliced and lengthened with the clothesline rope, over his shoulders and sighted along the line of stakes.

"Else here goes nuttin'," he remarked. "And as for you, you ugly white devil, either you cut out leaning on that black horse or I'll shake the dust out of your tail with a fence-post—see?"

Under the guidance of an expert, the sharp lay of the

plow sank smoothly from sight. With the creaking of the new eveners, the hiss of the coulter cutting through grass-roots, and a single bell-like note as its polished blade glanced along a stone, the plow got down to business in earnest and a sixteen-inch strip of sod shivered and rose to glide along the moldboard, turning slowly in the process and falling back again with the black loam uppermost. As Helen Conroy stood at the end of the field and watched the team and men grow dim and wavering in the heat-waves far down the field, it seemed that they were unwinding an endless black ribbon and leaving it behind them on the prairie.

On their return from the first round, Buttonhook went far enough on another to adjust the plow for the width of the furrow; then they unhitched and turned the horses into the pasture. Returning to the shack the men set some ash stakes and with the odds and ends left from the lumber, improvised a pen for the sow.

In the evening they sat on the sod before the house and Buttonhook held forth on varied subjects. The puppy, he said, didn't have any name and the kitten was just "Cat." The sow, however, he called "Katy"—"else," he chuckled, "she looks so much like Katy Drovolsky, down by the river." Then there was the gobbler, now adjusting his tail-feathers for the night on a perch above Conroy's wagon-box. "Else you shall call him 'Peter' because I raised him mostly under my bed and he knows his name. Last spring Peter made a fool of himself. Else he must have forgot he was a gobbler and thought he was a hen. He sat on a cluck-hen's nest and hatched out seven chickens, and when he seen what he done he was so ashamed of himself that he sat up on the roof of the house for three days to forget about himself. A fool of a gobbler—aint?"

Mention of their caller brought a sudden change to the countenance of Buttonhook. "Else that's the way of it; they'll run you out if they can. Else they'll burn up your house when you are away and they'll run cattle through your grain in the night-time and they'll set fire to your haystacks when cold weather comes—and else that aint the worst of it; there was that schoolteacher down Drovolsky way when she was walking home alone one night and—" The face of Buttonhook assumed an expression which made the cold shivers creep up Helen's spine. "Else if you should see that old cuss, the man on the iron gray, coming sometime, you should get a gun—"

In the morning Buttonhook left them, rumbling down the valley, his long legs and bony shins tied in an ungainly knot and draping the front of his wagon-box. He shouted back his final message:

"Else you shall have another team and my drill and flax-seed too—for what shall one bushel to three acres amount to?"

IN many ways his visit had been a boon to the Conroys. Aside from his gifts, which had been much in themselves, and aside from his help in the matter of the plow, he had bolstered up their confidence. And too the promise of the seed and drill had relieved a worry for they had but little money and the purchase would have been entirely beyond their means. The seed-potatoes too were a god-send, and Buttonhook would have departed leaving behind unalloyed joy, had it not been for his mention of those men of evil repute who dominated the range beyond the buttes to the west. To Conroy it seemed he was fighting a battle, entirely surrounded by odds which were worse because little understood and altogether invisible. To Helen the fear of the cowboys and especially the man on the iron gray had assumed the proportions of a nightmare. And again fear clutched at her heart.

But sometimes in the cool of the dawn when birds sang in the trees, when breezes whispered among the leaves and the white rooster sent challenge after challenge ringing among the hills, fear was almost forgotten and she followed lightly to the end of the field to watch the ever-widening strip of black where the prairie grasses were going down to hold the moisture, and the moist loam coming up to furnish a seedbed for the germination of their hopes and the promise of security and comfort in the years to come.

DAY by day the field grew in width—slowly, however, for without grain or hay for his horses Conroy could work but short hours; and there were other interruptions. Once he stopped to finish the garden and plow under the potato seed. Again, Katy's pen must be enlarged and better quarters prepared for the chickens. Two days were lost when the grass in the pasture grew short, necessitating a change in the fence. Then there were the spring rains lasting for two or three days—although Conroy learned not to grudge the time lost under drizzling skies because the freshly moistened sod cut more easily, turned better and lay smoother for each shower that crossed the valley.

The last days of April went by; May came and passed and then the first few days of June. Buttonhook had promised the use of the drill any time after the first of the month and advised that they should not continue their breaking after that date. And so one night when Conroy came down the field for the last time, he leaned on the polished handles of the plow, to turn and look at the acres over which he had trudged and plodded so many times. To him it was a beautiful sight; every furrow represented not blistered feet nor calloused hands, but stood for a duty well done.

At the coming of another dawn, Dolly and May were hitched to the wagon while Charley and Nigger were harnessed and tied securely to the rear of the wagon-box.

Lloyd Conroy had promised to return before night if that were possible, but it meant a long day alone for Helen. Her face was a trifle pale as she lifted it for a parting kiss, but she smiled bravely as he drove away.

She stood in the shack and watched until the wagon became a speck and the speck was caught up by the heat-waves, into the air, to disappear into the vastness of the valley floor. After her work was done, Katy and the chickens fed, she lifted a turkey hen for the hundredth time to see if the eggs beneath were still safe. She went to the garden and counted the young cucumber plants, noticed that the lettuce and radishes were showing promise. Resolutely, she kept her eyes turned to the ground and away from the hills, trying to forget that she was alone and that no friend or protector remained within call.

Back in the house she tried reading, but the day had become oppressive—she did not know why.

The puppy came waddling in, followed by the kitten and she took both in her lap. Soon the kitten jumped to the bed and curled up for a nap. The puppy grew restless and wandered out and Helen followed him.

A change had come over the sky. The valley, flooded with a white light in the morning, was now filled with a coppery haze and the leaves which had glistened in the sunlight now hung lifeless and dull. Even the wild folk were affected; the gophers had ceased their whistling and the kingbird no longer chirped in the box-elder behind the house. And then she realized that this feeling of depression, of nameless dread, had its origin in the silence, a silence that lay over everything like a vast velvet blanket.

Helen had never felt this before. She tried to think it was due to the absence of her husband's voice, the clank of trace-chains or the bell-like ring of the coulter; but this reasoning did not convince her.

Once more she returned to her chair. At noon she ate her lunch. Somehow she felt safer in the house. By mid-afternoon she was watching down the trail, though it wasn't time for the teams to return. Then the shadows began to creep out from the hills, like great fingers.

At suppertime she did not think of eating, but she peeled potatoes and sliced some of their shortened stock of bacon. She got water from the spring, glancing quickly about. The whole valley was in shadow and now she was in dread of approaching night. She fed and watered the stock and looked down the valley again. The shadows had deepened; their great silent fingers had now grasped the house. Darkness was slowly shutting down about her. Still there was a band of sunlight on the high bluffs and she looked up along their crests.

Then suddenly she stiffened; every nerve in her body tingled and every muscle recoiled as she remembered all she had heard of that terrible man, the man on the iron gray! And there he was! High on the brow of the hillside she saw the figure of a horse and a man, and the horse was an iron gray. He was looking down upon her and now he was moving down the face of the bluff, directly toward her. Long arrow-shaped clouds were above him, settling down over the valley.

Helen Conroy once more shut the door and dropped the bar in place, but in a moment she was out again and to the woodpile, returning with the ax. She went inside; a gust of wind shook the little house and the door creaked. Helen Conroy could not have cut the tail from a mouse—but she found the butcher-knife and placed it on the table close at hand. How long she sat there, immobile, she did not know. . . . Now came the rasp of a foot on the step, and although weak from fear, she made ready to swing the ax. As the door flew open with a violent noise she shrank back against the bed. Daring to look up, she saw a gigantic figure framed in the doorway. He was coming toward her. With all her strength she raised the ax. Then her knees buckled and she was down, while a voice she knew filled all the room:

"Else when do we eat?"

By the time Buttonhook had lighted the lamp Helen had regained, in part, her self-possession. Her first thought was of her husband and Buttonhook after a knowing glance in her direction, grinning from ear to ear, said: "Else he'll be along in a minute. I came on ahead with the flax-seed and the groceries. Else if it rains they'll get wet. Poke your head out the door and you shall hear him coming—aint?"

Yes, he was coming; out at the corner of the house she could hear the hoofs of horses, the silvery ring of disks and the merry tinkle of covering chains as they dragged along the ground. Then his voice:

"Come on, Nigger, get up into line—we're home at last!"

Helen leaned against the shack and a great wave of thankfulness swept over her. She forgot the horrors of the day, she even forgot the grim rider on the iron gray—for behind her was the ungainly form of Buttonhook Johnson, and before her the gloom was opening to disclose the form of her husband. She listened to the wind and discovered that it was sweet, clean and friendly. She glanced up at the forbidding hills, and saw them as a gigantic barrier, protecting her from the stormy sky. A thrill of comfort and coziness swept over her as she turned back toward the house.

Again it was dawn and the threatened storm had failed to come. At one corner of the field stood the big new drill of Buttonhook Johnson's. Six horses were before it and along its twelve-

foot expanse of shiny disks Buttonhook was passing, screwing down the oil-cups. While Lloyd Conroy was pouring the amber grain from canvas bags into the hopper Helen stood on the running-board and buried her hands and wrists in the cool stream of grain. She had never seen flax in any quantity before and feeling it glide between her fingers as smoothly as mercury, seeing it flow into the feed-cups, filling them one by one, gave her the thrill that comes only to those who put their hearts along with the seed, into the soil. Lifting a handful, she allowed the grain to sift back to the hopper and as the tiny grains passed back before her eyes, each flashed a message of hope.

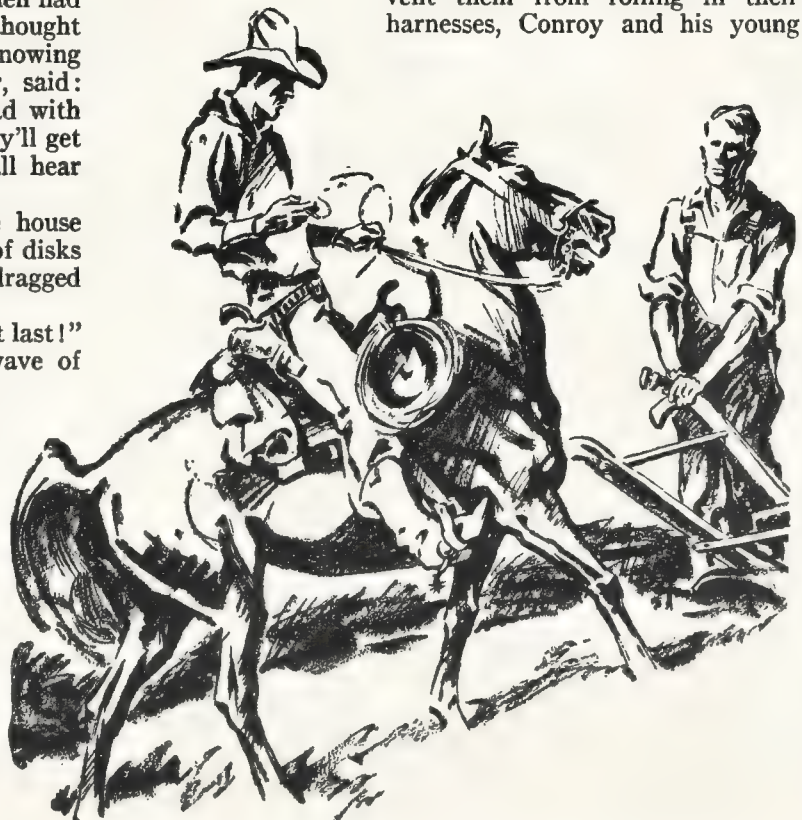
Buttonhook threw his weight on the long levers, giving all the pressure the machine had. "Else if it don't rain the seedlets shall be down where the moisture is—aint?"

Climbing to the hopper and standing erect at one end, he spoke to the horses and the drill burst into musical activity. In the bottom of the hopper a long rod began to revolve, carrying small gears whose teeth caught the grain and pushed a few kernels at a time, into a tiny opening. Helen Conroy watched the thread-like amber streams falling into lines of rubber hoses and lower down she saw it again passing between the disks, thence into the miniature furrows opened by the whirling shiny blades. For a moment the stream of flax remained in sight; then the jingling chains covered the little furrows. The seed was in the ground.

On the evening of the second day, just as the shadows from the bluffs were merging into dusk, Lloyd Conroy came down the field on the last round. Helen and Buttonhook stood at the end of the field, for the latter was waiting to take home the drill and the horses he had contributed. The work was done. As the drill came to a stop and the clamor of the disks and chains died away, Buttonhook bent his tall frame to look at the tally.

"Else 'tis eggzactly sixty acres and we should worry if it aint a good job for two days' work—aint?"

When the horses had gone one by one, toward the spring, with Buttonhook following to prevent them from rolling in their harnesses, Conroy and his young



wife stood arm in arm, gazing before them at an area of shadow darker even than the coming night, stretching away into the dusk, where they had placed their trust in the virgin bosom of the prairie.

JUNE passed swiftly; meanwhile rains came, steady downpours, and the tiny seeds in the ground swelled and lifted the sod in slender ridges. One morning the ridges broke apart and revealed long lines of delicate green. In a few days more the slender shoots rose in serried ranks like miniature evergreens, and before two weeks had passed, the black of the soil was covered by the green of growing flax.

Life too, had burst forth in the farmyard. True to Buttonhook's promise, the "piglets" had arrived, and day after day they charged back and forth across the yard like a school of brown minnows. Clucking and belligerent white hens strolled about, accompanied by convoys of yellow chicks, while each evening, long-necked turkey hens came from the tall grass followed by foolish-looking youngsters which spent their time poking their heads in every direction and emitting soft notes of wonder or complaint.

With hot weather came haying-time and Conroy, his machinery purchased with credit based upon the growing grain, worked early and late, cutting, raking and stacking. There was always the possibility of drought in the year to come, therefore Conroy kept at the haying long after he had enough for his immediate needs, until the valley by the house was dotted with stacks and the odor of new-mown hay filled the air by day and by night.

July brought also new potatoes and beans and peas. The garden, on sod, required no attention of any kind and the rains came as if at the personal order of the Conroys. By the first of August the garden patch was a riot of vegetation and the field upon which so much depended was one great mass of waving green. For a time the field paled to blue as millions of bell-like flowers nodded in the sun and as tiny bolls replaced the petals the plants kept on branching and growing, until their ranks were so close

that Conroy's hat would float anywhere on the heads of the grain. Late in the month the color changed again. The green lost its luster and yellow splashes appeared here and there, gradually spreading until their borders met and the field was slowly turning brown.

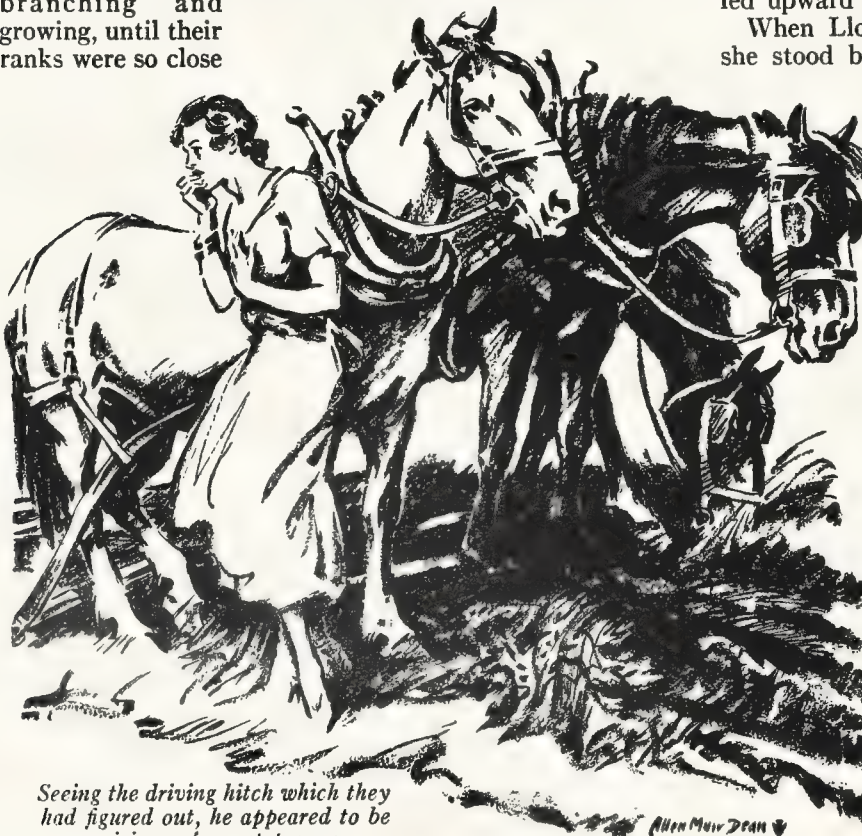
Although threatening clouds swept across the skies again and again, no hail came, and once a migrating colony of grasshoppers, darkening the white light of the sun, passed on into the north without alighting. From time to time also, mounted men passed among the hills or rode along the bluffs above the homestead, but in no way did they molest the newcomers. Even the cattlemen's hatred seemed for the time abated.

About the first of September, Lloyd Conroy made another trip to Buttonhook Johnson's. When he returned late in the afternoon he was driving six horses attached to a mechanical monster which nearly filled the yard to overflowing. Buttonhook—this time for a reasonable consideration—had furnished a push-binder to harvest the crop, and now that it stood at the end of the field Conroy could not resist the temptation to try one round before he unhitched for the night.

The machine was constructed somewhat on the order of a big letter "T" with the cross-member at the head. A heavy iron pipe ran back from the cross-piece and on either side were the hitches for three horses. The rear end of the pipe terminated in a small deck and was supported by a single wheel floating free except that it was controlled by a tiller-like arrangement which could be gripped between the legs of the operator. Here too just above the tiller were the control levers, each operating through long rods leading ahead to the binder proper. The cross-arm of the "T" was represented on the left by the elevator and binding mechanism and the bundle-carrier. On the right was the knife, extending a full twelve feet, held and guided in the guards on the front of the platform. A twenty-four-foot endless canvas ran under and above the platform and, at the end nearest the binder, terminated between the slats of the shorter elevator canvases which led upward to the top of the machine.

When Lloyd Conroy helped his wife to the deck and she stood by his side, looking ahead over the backs of the horses, she was looking at a veritable forest and jungle of chains and wheels and sprockets. In that wild tangle of steel, there seemed neither order nor form. It appeared but an intricate mass of metallic junk running into the tons. Aside from the typewriter, the adding-machine and the linotype, it was probably the most complicated machine yet invented by man. Beside it the mechanics of the airplane and wireless appear like a child's toys.

Lloyd Conroy and his girl wife had come at last to one of those supreme moments in the lives of the men and women who wrest their living from the soil. First the vision, which takes into account neither hail nor drought. Next, the partial disillusionment of hard work, of heat and flies, and the long months of alternate hope and depression while the tiny plants rise from the seedbeds to take up the unequal fight with Nature. At last the time comes man may look out over acres of gold and brown waving in the wind or sighing gently at every soft movement of a breeze—a dream nearing fulfillment. In a few more hours the vision may become a reality.



Seeing the driving hitch which they had figured out, he appeared to be voicing a fervent prayer.

Allen Muir Dean

Lloyd Conroy spoke to the horses and the great machine moved ahead.

Standing on the precarious footing of the narrow steel deck, with one hand grasping her husband's clothing, Helen watched with fascinated eyes. He shifted a lever, and the forward end of the ponderous machine tilted until the sharp points of guards combed through the prairie grasses. At the edge of the field he kicked another lever, and now that great mass of iron and steel sprang into pulsating life. The limp and apparently useless chains were now taut and rigid, the gears and sprockets whirled and flashed, the whole machine was one perfect whole.

Slowly the long reel revolved and the narrow strips of wood brushed the top of the flax. As the twelve-foot knife met the stems of the grain, they shivered and leaped into the air. There they met the reel-slats and dropped back onto the platform canvas in a long brown line, sweeping on toward the binder-head like khaki-clad infantry.

By bending and leaning forward the girl could see the brown line as it reached the end of the platform, there to turn and dart upward between the elevator canvasses. It reached the top, hesitated and was driven down by the remorseless force of the packer-arms; but there were other arms below. Caught between the two sets of arms the flax began to bunch in the form of a bundle. Rapidly it increased in size until the arms which had stopped it could no longer resist the strain and dropping back ever so little, they set another agent in motion—a long steel needle flashed up from beneath the deck of the binder and like a snake struck suddenly and savagely, carrying in its fangs a strand of twine. As it passed over the bundle the twine was met by three little fingers of steel, opening and closing exactly like a human hand. Grasping the twine, the fingers revolved once and automatically wound the twine around themselves, then forced it over their tops. Holding fast to the ends, they pulled the loop thus formed into a knot. A tiny knife darted out and cut the twine. In the smallest fraction of a second the operation was completed and the bundle was kicked down onto the carrier.

Steadily the machine moved down the field. Ahead, the growing flax; beneath, the quivering brown stubble; out on its left, pile after pile of finished bundles. A dust-cloud arose from the bullwheel and the horses' hoofs, but neither the man nor the woman took note. Flying ants arose in clouds and swarms; the machine pitched and swayed like a ship on a heavy sea; but neither heeded. They saw nothing save that hurrying line of brown which meant so much to them both.

There were delays, of course and Conroy, inexperienced as he was, was slow in making adjustments. The twine broke, an evener clip came off, bolts worked loose—but at sundown on the third day, he passed over the last narrow band of uncut grain and nothing remained but the windrows stretching from side to side.

That night there was a session with a mail-order catalogue—for while they remembered Buttonhook's caution: "Else you shall not count your chickens before somebody lays the eggs!" still the crop was harvested and they felt justified in figuring the cost of a few comforts.

FALL came and still no sign of the man on the iron gray. There were times when Helen Conroy felt that perhaps Buttonhook Johnson had been playing upon the natural fears of a tenderfoot, but occasionally teams drove into the valley loaded with berry-pickers and the consensus of opinion among them seemed to be that the Conroys had taken a grave risk in trespassing on the borders of the old cattle-king's range, and that sooner or later he would strike. At such times the old fears came back to her.

Late one night in the fall, Buttonhook Johnson again stood in the door. They had not heard him coming and his voice was the first intonation of his presence.

"Else the mob shall be here soon," came from the shadowy form which apparently reached from the threshold to the top of the door and part way down again. "But you should not need to worry; we can sleep on the ground and aint the cook-car hitched onto the tail of the separator?"

Conroy hastily slipped into his clothes and went to the door, peering out into the night. Far down the valley was a wavering, yellowish glow and a ribbon of sparks and flame streaming out on the wind. Then, as the air currents shifted toward him, he caught the low rumble of machinery and the hoarse murmur of the exhaust.

In a few moments a line of wagons emerged from the shadows and clattered into the yard; horses clanked to and from the water-hole and lanterns flashed out like fireflies moving aimlessly here and there. Now the roar of the engine had grown louder; a crimson flare lighted up the rumbling mass and a fire-shovel rang out clearly as it struck the sill of the open fire-door. Roaring and hissing, the engine wheeled by the corner of the little granary that had been built when the promise of a crop had made it necessary, and there Buttonhook stood waving a lantern to spot the separator. Leaving its giant partner in position for the next day's run, the engine cut loose, ran around behind and pulled out the cook-car, leaving that in turn in the middle of the yard. Then close by the house it came to rest and soon no sound could be heard save the gentle hiss of the escaping steam.

HELEN CONROY could not sleep. Try as she might, she could not subdue her excitement. Again and again, she slipped from her bed to look out into the night. Dimly through the darkness she could make out masses of greater shadow where the teams were tethered to their racks, while near at hand the engine loomed, still whispering its message of latent power.

Three o'clock came and the song of the engine had reached its lowest ebb. At three-thirty there was the silvery tinkle of an alarm. Now she saw the fireman climb to the engine platform; again came the ring of the shovel, again the flare of freshly disturbed embers and soon a hollow moan issued from the stack, as the forced draft sent sullen clouds of smoke high in the air. Four o'clock, and another alarm. Lights broke out in the cook-car and there came the rattle of pans and the clatter of dishes while the odor of coffee drifted across the yard. The faintest tinge of dawn showed in the sky at five o'clock, and the fireman reached for a cord above his head. An ear-splitting shriek broke from the whistle, and the silence of night gave way to hurry and bustle.

Conroy and Helen ate breakfast in the cook-car with Buttonhook Johnson. The engine was spurting steam from the exhaust, the separator was oiled and the long drive-belt flapped in the breeze as it stretched away from the drive-wheel to the pulley. The wagons were lumbering out into the field and the water-monkey was busy pumping water from the spring.

"Else you should eat hearty and fill yourself up good; for isn't this the day we shall make for you the money?" Buttonhook, his mouth full of sausage, was right in his element—his greatest pleasure in life came from talking against heavy odds.

"Don't you go to sleep on the job now," he mumbled. "From now on you should sit up nights with a shotgun, for if that feller finds out you have flax here ready to haul out, wouldn't he quick-like send some one to help out?"

"You don't think that he would actually steal our grain, do you?" asked Conroy.

"Sure thing! Else haven't I told you there aint a thing in the world that old cuss wont do when he feels like it? This year maybe he kinder lets you alone, being there's plenty of water in the bad-lands—but you just wait for a year when he has to bring his cattle out, and see what happens then! That's why I kinder hate to pile the straw so near the granary. It's good feeding for your stock this winter, but it's also good burning for a match—aint?"

"Buttonhook's what I call a pessimiser," interjected the cook. "Them cowboys aint done any real troubles for anybody for more'n a year, that I've heard tell. Maybe they leave you all alone."

But breakfast was cut short by the arrival of the first wagon loaded with bundles of flax and they left the cook-car to watch the first of their grain go through the big machine.

Buttonhook, a piece of sausage in one hand and a heel of bread in the other, climbed to the top of the separator. He waved the bread and two wagons pulled in beside the feeder. He waved the sausage and the engineer pulled gently on the throttle. The long drive-belt stirred and began its endless journey, the great separator trembled, groaned, and tiny puffs of yellow dust burst from its metal armor. The trembling increased to a wavering motion like the rocking of a boat, the groan rose to a shrill whine and the puffs of dust became a cloud hovering above the machine and shrouding in a yellow haze. Above it all, the ungainly form of Buttonhook Johnson, goggled now and looking ludicrously like a hoot-owl, waved both the sausage and the bread. A rain of bundles struck the moving canvas feeder, passing slowly up and up until they disappeared into the glittering knives and onto the whirling teeth of the cylinder. A wild scream rose from the churning monster and as if in answer, came the high-pitched voice of Buttonhook Johnson:

"Else now shall you give her hell!"

IN the granary Lloyd Conroy and Helen had taken a position where they could see up along the spout to the weigher on the separator. Buttonhook joined them there, still chewing the last of the sausage rind.

It was his idea, this running the grain direct from the separator. "Else why should you bust your back with a shovel when the doggone' stuff'll shovel itself?" he had asked. There was but one objection—the additional risk of fire—but they had decided to risk that. Just now the eyes of all three were fixed on the weight-arm of the weigher. It took some time for the grain to pass through, but finally the arm began to tremble. It rose slowly and doubtfully until halfway through its arc, then it tilted with a clang and an amber stream poured down the spout and out onto the floor of the granary. To Lloyd Conroy and his wife, it seemed the most beautiful sight their eyes had ever beheld. They ran their fingers through the silky kernels. It felt cool and as smooth as velvet and the touch of every tiny particle seemed a caress. And it was all theirs!

All day long the great machine thundered out its cheering message. There was a brief pause at night; then again at dawn the thick dust shut down. When Lloyd Conroy climbed down from the separator at the end of the run, the tally on the weigher showed five hundred sixty bushels, which added to the reading before the tally on the weigher had dropped back to a row of zeroes, made fifteen hundred sixty bushels in all.

"Else now," warned Buttonhook Johnson, "you shall look out all the times for fire. The first thing in the

morning you plow for a firebreak just as I told you—and don't forget, look out for fire; it's a darn' good chance for them fellers to burn you out!"

Conroy promised, and long after the machine and the crew had disappeared down the valley he sat in the doorway, hand in hand with Helen. Apparently they had made what the farmers called a killing—something that happens once in a long time and then mostly to those children of God whose need is great.

Again and again they multiplied fifteen hundred sixty bushels by \$3.19—but the truth was hard to realize, and they figured it all over again. Of course the price *might* drop; then there was the threshing-bill which would be heavy, aside from other costs connected with the crop; then their account at the store— Still, the remainder was enough to make them dizzy. And that night they went to bed, buoyed up by the fruition of a dream come true.

BUT the gods of the prairies were not through—and that night the terror came.

It came from the north, the only direction from which it could come at all. Fanned by a wind that roared along the valley, laden with billows of smoke and ashes, it struck without warning, in the dead of night.

Something awoke Lloyd Conroy. There was no sound save the roaring of the wind; and that had been blowing all through the night. There was no warning of danger that could have awakened the lightest sleeper; yet a strange premonition of ill seemed to permeate the little room. He awakened his wife and they lay staring into the dark.

Then with a bound Conroy was out of bed. A faint odor had reached his nostrils and he knew in a moment it was the smell of burning sage, although he had never experienced it before. Too, the sky had grown brighter and now the room was filled with a subdued glow, while queer flickering shadows were playing among the pans above the kitchen range.

A moment later he was partly dressed and out in the yard. While the fire itself was invisible, he could see the clouds of smoke above the flames, and they glowed like the open door of a gigantic furnace.

Hearing Helen's voice, he hurried into the house, helping her gather up the choicest of her few possessions; then back in the yard again to find that the fire was perceptibly nearer. Now he could hear a low rushing sound, terrible and menacing.

Stricken by thought of his utter impotence in the face of such odds, Conroy was like a man in a rage, raising his clenched fist and shaking it in the face of the oncoming holocaust. There wasn't a thing in the world he could do. As thousands of newcomers had done before, and as they would do in the future, he had not heeded the warning of fire, at least, not to the extent of taking immediate action, and the high prairie grass ran without a break right up to the granary, the strawstack and almost to the house. He did not know how to backfire and there was nothing to backfire against if he had known. The horses were in the pasture, but they would have been of little use to him in his inexperienced hands, even were they harnessed and before him. It was apparently all over now; nothing but an act of God could save him and his wife from losing everything they owned. Their flax, over which they had watched and prayed and rejoiced—their machinery, not yet paid for—even the little shack, was doomed. A small, bare patch of alkali at the foot of the bluff offered a dubious protection to their persons, but that was all. It was a matter only of moments when all they would own would be exactly what they wore and could carry in their arms.

As usual in the case of greatest emergency, it was the



*Those crimson drops
were falling steadily
back of the plowing.*

woman who gave thought to saving what they might.

"Quick, Lloyd," she cried, "we can save something—just what we can carry, if no more!" And she was off, running toward the house. He fol-

ABOVE the rush and roar another sound attracted his attention, and he turned to look up along the bluff. A wild surge of hope came to him at the sight. Surely those were men and horses—surely that long line of flickering flame was a backfire! Whence they came he did not think even to ask himself, nor did it matter, for the roar of the fire was deafening. Whoever they were, they were too late.

Then he heard a voice from the bluff above—a single sentence, half-order, half-plea: "For Christ's sake, hurry!"—and the horses were coming on again, eight of them—four abreast. Now they were on the alkali; now they had reached the edge of the plowing. He saw a man standing on a gang-plow, and in his hands, a tangle of lines leading to the plunging teams ahead. Swiftly the man kicked the lever and the moldboards no longer glittered in the firelight—they had dropped beneath the sod.

That the team could cross the valley seemed to Conroy hardly probable, but those men must know what they were about. Yet what was the use? That raging fire would never stop an instant for that narrow strip of sod! But even as he was thinking a new man came upon the scene, through the drifting smoke, a mounted man, carrying a long metal object in his hand. Holding this metal tube before him, he turned a valve; a match flared and tiny crimson drops began falling into the grass. The rider's horse sprang to one side as the fire licked his legs, then the man leaned forward in the saddle and they were off.

Conroy was now to see the value of the two furrows plowed by the team ahead, for while they could have no effect whatever upon the main fire, they would serve well to check the backfire. As the rider lunged through the night, those crimson drops were falling steadily just back of the plowing, and where he passed, a long line of small fires sprang up, one side going out as it reached the sod, the other side eating its way slowly toward the approaching terror.

Still Conroy saw no reason for much hope. It was a splendid piece of work, no doubt about that, but still the narrow strip of burned ground would cause no more than a flicker in the ranks of the onrushing monster. The back-fire was too slow to be of any use.

Now the fire was no more than two hundred yards away. But the game, it seemed, was not yet played out—for as Conroy gazed in fear and admiration down that strip of grass, lighted as by a thousand arc-lights, he saw the rider coming back, his horse running as the men of the plains would say; "like the mill-tails of hell," right down between the fires. The man was setting a third fire between the backfire and the rolling wall of flame beyond!

In a matter of seconds now the drama would be played out. The team was out of the zone of danger, struggling up the barren slope beyond, to safety. And the rider too, had won in that mad race with death; he was safe, still leaning low in the saddle and peering over the head of his horse, as he watched other men coming from the shadows and forming a thin skirmish-line across the valley, their business to watch for the treacherous tumbleweeds which might roll across the firebreak, carrying seeds of still more fire.

The tension had grown until nerves were ready to snap; then a voice rang out: (Please turn to page 136)

lowed, and hastily gathering the most necessary articles, they ran toward the spot of alkali. As they ran, jackrabbits passed, almost underfoot, racing for their lives. Above their heads, prairie-chickens hurtled like bullets toward the lower end of the valley; then came a deer—but there was no time or inclination to watch. They made another trip to the house, and still one more, before they were forced to stop and gaze, fascinated, at the awe-inspiring sight in the bend of the valley above them. The whole floor was a mass of whirling flames, while the walls of the bluffs were enveloped in what seemed like swiftly running streams of molten gold. The low, rushing sound had risen almost to a roar and ashes rained from the sky like thickly falling snow.

On their little patch of alkali, Helen Conroy clung to her husband in terror. Before this awful thing rushing down upon them her nerves were fast giving way. It was Conroy's turn to comfort and sustain her. He tried to forget the agony of his approaching loss as he held her close and ran his fingers through her hair, while repeating foolish words which had no meaning at all. But he could not keep his eyes from the fire. Five minutes, ten, he thought—then it would be upon him. But there was nothing he could do, nothing anybody could do, only stand and wait, stand and watch the destruction of his little world.

It seemed to him as if the front of the fire was actually rolling over and over along the ground, while above the tumbling, fiery mass, long red tongues reached out as if grasping for more prey, and higher yet, a mighty column of smoke and sparks shot skyward. Now it had reached the outer edge of his hayfield, and a small stack disappeared under the surging sea of flame—the beginning of the end.



*When an old-time cow-hand starts complain-
ing about his partner's
cooking and writes
poetry to a widow, most
anything might happen
—and just about every-
thing does happen in
this amusing yarn.*

By
BUD LA MAR

Saved from Love

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

YOU would never think that an old goat like One-card Harrigan would go and fall in love. Or for that matter that any woman would fall in love with him. No, you would never think of it; not if you saw him first, you wouldn't.

Not that he aint gifted, you understand. For anybody will tell you that One-card is a trick and fancy poker-player, all around cow-hand and a fair to middlin' shot. But he has led a rough life, away from the soothin' influence of female society and his features show that whisky, lead and boot-heels have frequently been at work upon 'em.

He's a tall, gloomy-lookin' *hombre* with a revolvin' eye on the off side, a leapin' Adam's apple and a pair of ears resemblin' a couple of parachutes. He has a complexion like a raw tomato and a melodious voice which sounds like somebody blowin' a clarinet in a barrel. From his upper lip dangles a mustache which, on a dark day, you would mistake for a couple of horse's tails.

Now it don't stand to reason that a good-lookin' lady like the widow Alfrieda Cowthorne, with the years restin' lightly upon her and owner of a good cow outfit, would ever come to desire a wild old pelican like One-card for a permanent fixture in her life. But the ways of Cupid are pretty strange, when you come to dwell upon 'em.

One-card Harrigan and me (Cold Deck Scully, as I am called) have sashayed up and down the Western plains for a good many years together. We used to shoot and slash, gamble and drink, fight and cuss, punch cows and break wild horses. Now we have settled down, four miles west of Broom Tail Gulch, to spend the rest of our days in peace and quiet.

We built a cabin on Kerry Mountain. It don't look like any char-tto, but when the wind is howlin' outside and the snow is driftin' over the roof then it's a mighty good place to be, toastin' our shins before the fire and

listenin' to the water hissin' in the tea-kettle previous to mixin' a couple of hot ones. And I claims that a man in his right senses aint likely to fling himself away from such inducements for the stormy ways of matrimony. For even if the widow is a pretty good cook, she is bound to go wild as a drunk Comanche when ashes is spilled on her rugs, whereas in our house, we spill and be damned and sweep once a week.

All this I tries to explain to my poor partner, but he is so far gone that he would pass a royal flush to a full house. He has reached the poetikal stage. I finds one of his pomes where he had hid it in an old boot under the bunk, and it reads as follows:

*O Will you be my Huckleberry
Sech pies you Make of the Gooseberry
It is Enuff to Make me Weary
Of Ham and Eggs and Sowbelly
Cooked so Goldarn unsanitiry
By that Old Rip Cold deck Scully*

Now I don't mind to be called an old rip, but I rises to tell the cock-eyed world that I aint going to have my cookin' critiksized and slandered by the likes of him who can't even bile a scuttle of coffee without scaldin' both ears and breakin' a leg.

"One-card," I asks him that night, "did you ever find any pack-rats mixed up along with your grub, or anything else besides the reasonable amount of flies which you got to expect this time of year?"

"Well," he answers, squintin' one eye, "not to speak of. But I'm growin' tired of beans and bacon. Besides it aint good for a man. There aint the right number of galleries in that kind of grub."

"One-card," says I, "man and boy, for forty years, I been eatin' them kind of vittles and I never partook of a gallery yet!"

"Yes," puts in the jigger, "and look at you now!"

"What's the matter with me, you old satchel-seat?" I inquires. "And how did you get *your* good looks? Eatin' horse-douvers and patty de far grar? Anyway, you're too old to be writin' fool poetry."

"What poetry?" he asks, lookin' sheepish.

"That one about '*will you be my raspberry*' and where I wipe the floor with the bacon before throwin' it in the skillet. The one where I am an old rip!"

"Oh," says he, "that one!"

"Did you write more? I'd love to see 'em!"

"That's a damn' good pome!" says One-card. "If you notice all the end words rhyme together, whereas in most pomes only two lines rhyme, and in some only the off lines—and I even seen 'em which did not rhyme at all!"

There aint no use of arguin' with anybody like that, so I saddles my horse and rides down to Broom Tail Gulch and goes into Larry Schoonover's ice-cream parlor. Old Silurian Smith is standin' up to the bar in company with Toots Blair and Wing-shot Wilson. Accordin' to the signs they been there quite a spell.

"Howdy!" booms Larry as I enters the place, which is thick with smoke and the smell of—vanilla. "We just heard about your partner's engagement to Miss Alfrieda. Step up and lean yore belly against the bar. This one's on me!"

Now this was news to me. I had never suspected that things had got so bad as all that: I gulped down a couple and got to thinkin'. "Where did you hear about this engagement?" I asks Larry.

"It's in the Broom Tail Gulch *X-Ray* what just come out this evening." And he digs under the bar and hands me the paper. Sure enough, there it is right on the front page with a big head-line over it: MISS ALFRIEDA COWTHORNE TO WED XAVIER FRANCIS HARRIGAN. The piece goes on to tell that the widow herself had admitted it and that she was goin' to Chicago for a few days. One-card would follow her there and escort her about this shoppin' trip and then they would get married on their return. And this was as far as I read the dang' thing. I had to take another drink of Larry's cough-syrup by then.

"I would of never thunk it possible," says Toots Blair. "It don't look right to me!"

"What don't look right?" I asks.

"Why, that a nice lady like Miss Alfrieda would enter matrimony with an old skunk-faced moral derelict like that decayin'-souled, gall-infected partner of yores!"

"My Gawd!" says I. "I didn't know he was all them things, Toots. Set 'em up, Larry; I feel weak."

"Here y'are," says Larry fillin' up the glasses. And then he wipes his hands on his apron, leans over the bar, winks one eye and says to us, confidential-like:

"Boys, we ought to do something to prevent old One-card from throwin' his life away like that. Why, he's in the prime of life, and what'll happen if he's cut off from his drinkin' all to once? Which he will be if he marries the widow? Shrinkin' of the gizzard will set in and he'll pine away like a coyote that's et off'n a strychnined cow!"

"Larry's right!" says Wingshot. "You can't make a turtledove out of an old tarantula!"

"Maybe not," I puts in. "But he's pretty sot in his ways, let me tell you!"

"What you want to do," says Larry, "is use dipli-o-macy!"

"And slip it in his coffee when he aint lookin'?"

"No. It's like kickin' a man in the back and when he turns around, makin' him think that you done him a favor!"

"Oh," says I, "something easy, like climbin' a bob-wire fence with a wildcat under each arm!"

"You could tell her, in an offhand way," continues Larry, "that he sleeps with his mouth open; or that he snores and grits his teeth like a windmill out of grease; or that he sews himself up in his underwear in the winter and gives out obnoxious odors. The idea is to pi'son her mind against him."

And then who should come in but One-card himself, his face all lit up with joy, and steppin' high like he was goin' to take off, like a balloon.

"Boys," he says, "the drinks is on me! I have promised to never look even sideways upon another glass of medicine after tonight!"

"We heard you was goin' to Chicago," says Larry, settin' out another glass.

"You heard right," says One-card. "Miss Alfrieda is leavin' tomorrow and I'm to meet her there in a couple of days. Cold-deck Scully is goin' along with me and be a chaperon."

"Who, *me*?" I gasps. "Goin' to Chicago?"

"Shore!" answers One-card. "You wouldn't want me to go alone. Why, I'd feel like a pore calf abandoned by his mammy on the lone perairie. Besides, Miss Alfrieda wants you to meet some friends of hers. She's already wrote 'em that she was fetchin' a couple of dashin' cowboys. Them wimmen will just dote over you, Cold-deck, you're so handsome!"

"By gad, I aint!" says I. "I mean, I aint settin' a foot away from here!"

"S-h-h-h!" whispers Wing-shot, nudgin' me in the ribs. "There's your chance to do some dirty work!"

"Say!" pipes up Silurian Smith, who had been sippin' his drinks in silence up till then. "By chowder, I'd like



The old dog let out a howl; then he whirled and sank his teeth into the leg of the general, who right away forgot his dignity.

to take a *pasear* to that there Chicago town! Last time I was there she wasn't much bigger than Broom Tail Gulch, but I heerd she growed conside'ble. They got them street-cars and sky-scratchers. Who knows—I might pick me a housekeeper too!"

SILURIAN is an old retired prospector who has now took up trappin' and coyote-poisonin'. He's about one hundred years old, five feet tall in his boots and wears a long bristly white beard. He lives in the Bad-lands, with a whole set-to of yappin' hounds, and the country is so rough out there that you can't even ride a horse to his place; you have to ride a mule. A nice outfit to bring a woman to! But then it aint likely that one would have him, or me either, so I reckoned it would be safe to go. Well, goin' was a awful mistake and I would of been better off stayin' to home, but I never had no inklin' how it would all turn out.

The whole town turned out to see us off a couple of days later. We had dug out our best clothes and One-card cut a dashin' figure, decked out in his fancy leather vest with Indian beadwork all over it, his big flat-brimmed beaver hat and his mustaches flowin' in the breeze. I had on my Prince Albert coat which was in pretty fair shape outside of a few holes and a kind of greenish hue which wasn't the original color of it, but very strikin'. I like that coat because you can hide two six-shooters, a shotgun and a quart of cold medicine under the tails of it and still not look bulky.

Silurian was the one which didn't look like he had been followin' the latest styles. He wore a coon-skin cap with the tail hangin' behind, a leather coat with fringes and Indian signs painted on it and a pair of fancy moccasins. He wanted to take along his squirrel rifle, but we had talked him out of that and so instead he had his skin-nin'-knife.

But he insisted on fetchin' his old hound which was named Grover Cleveland. All his dogs had names from famous persons. There was William Jennings Bryan, Jawn the Babtist, Michigan Central, Connetikut, Pierce Arrow and many others.

Grover Cleveland was the oldest, and sort of feeble, and Silurian was afraid that he wouldn't get good care if he was left behind. He was a sad-lookin' old dog with long droopin' ragged ears, his fur was wore out in spots and I don't suppose he ever got lonesome, havin' plenty of company right with him at all times.

AT first Silurian objected to the idea of Grover ridin' in the baggage-car but he finally agreed to it. We bid everybody good-by, the train got under way, and Broom Tail Gulch was soon left behind.

At every stop Silurian would pile out and run back to the baggage-car to see how Grover Cleveland was makin' out. And when we got to where the country was more settled and the people unused to such strange spectacles, he liked to caused several stampedes, runnin' down the station platform with his coon tail floatin behind, his whiskers stickin' straight out before him and the fringes of his buckskin coat wooshin' in the wind.

"I'll be glad when we get there," he'd say every little bit. "Grover is actin' poorly; what he needs is exercise and a couple pounds of bear steak."

We arrived in Chicago at sundown, a couple of days later, and we thought at first that everybody was leavin' town, there was so many folks in that depot. We got our suitcases and Grover Cleveland and wandered around for an hour, lookin' for our way out. Then we stood out in the street watchin' all them people dartin' every which way like gophers.

"I got the address writ down on a piece of paper," said One-card, searchin' through his pockets. "We're supposed to get on a taxis cab and tell the driver where to go. Where the hell is that dang' paper? You don't suppose that I've lost it?"

"That's just the kind of a thing you would do," I says to him. "Did you look in your boot-top?"

"It aint there," says One-card, lookin' distressed and scratchin' his head. "By golly, I looked in all my pockets. It shore does beat hell, now don't it!"

"It does," I says. "One-card, you aint got the brains of a chickadee!"

"Shet up! Maybe you got it. Let's look in the suit-cases."

We opens up our baggage on the sidewalk and shook out everything—but nary a sign of the paper.

"I'll tell you what," suggests One-card. "Let's get one of them taxis cabs anyway and ride around. We might see Miss Alfrieda or she might see us."

There was quite a crowd gathered around, watchin' us with their mouths open and passin' remarks to each other and I figured we'd better move.

"Here!" called One-card to a passin' automobile painted bright yellow. "We'll ride your danged outfit!"

THE thing stopped with an awful screech and liked to scared Grover Cleveland into fits. The driver opened the door for us and we climbed in, all but Grover Cleveland. He took a good look at the taxis cab, shook his head and started pullin' the other way.

"Get in hyar, you hell-hound!" yelled Silurian, jerkin' the lead rope. But the old dog refused to budge an inch. He was suspicious. We all took holt of the rope and went to pullin' hard; then the animal saw that he was greatly outnumbered and he jumped in of his own accord, which caused us all to fall in a heap. Silurian rolled out of the door on the other side into the street and the hound right after him.

"Whooo-ha!" screeched Silurian, pickin' himself up. "Ketch that dog!"

But Grover Cleveland had finally attained liberty, something which he had hungered for since we had left Broom Tail Gulch and he took out in the direction of Kerry Mountain, dodgin' automobiles and people and howlin', "Yow! yow! yow!" every jump.

"Trail that dog! Get to goin'!" said Silurian to the driver, but the fellow looked at him and said that he wasn't chasin' no dog through town and if he wanted him back to put an ad in the paper.

Whereupon Silurian clutched at his belt, flourished his bull knife and threatened to scalp the fellow clean if he didn't start, and start quick.

The next minute we were bouncin' up and down the streets, clutchin' madly for support, bumpin' our heads against the top of the crazy outfit while Silurian hung outside on the running-board, yellin' at the top of his squeaky voice:

"Whoa, Grover! Come back hyar, Grover! Grover Cleveland, you ornery old fool, stop!"

I don't know how far we went, only missin' death and destruction by an inch many times, but all at once there was an awful crash. We were lifted through the top into the air and flung sideways with great force. I lit astraddle of a bush and One-card right on top of me. I saw Silurian runnin' across a big open field and I thought we had got out in the country, only there was lights everywhere and people walkin' all around. The taxis cab was draped around an iron pole and the driver was comin' out of the wreck lookin' pretty mad.

I grabbed a suitcase, and One-card did the same; then

we hit out at a brisk pace to where we had seen Silurian last. We found him settin' on a bench, larrupin' hell out of Grover Cleveland. The old dog was about played out and he made little yappin' sounds. This got the best of Silurian and he quit beatin' the dog and went to blubberin' like a cow.

We asked a stranger what was the name of this place and he told us that it was called Andrew Jackson's Park. You would never think they'd be a place like that in a big city. There was enough range and grass to graze a thousand head of cattle and all goin' to waste, for we never saw a single head of stock on it.

"Well, boys," said One-card, "it's gettin' pretty late; it must be anyway nine o'clock. We better camp here all night and start out lookin' for Miss Alfrieda early in the morning."

It was a nice warm night and the three of us began searchin' around for a good place to sleep. We walked across the big pasture where the grass was short but thick like a carpet and after while we came to some bushes and on the edge of 'em was a long iron pole with a number nine painted on it stickin' out of the ground. Silurian tied Grover to this pole and we stretched out behind the bushes, usin' our suitcases for pillows. What with all the excitement we had been through we hadn't any trouble goin' to sleep.

We woke up about daylight, feelin' sort of hungry and stiff in the joints, not havin' done much campin'-out for the past few years. Silurian untied Grover Cleveland from his Number Nine pole, we picked up our satchels and struck out toward the depot.

Pretty soon we came to a big lake stretchin' out as far as the eye could reach. It was the most water we ever seen at one settin' and we all stood there gazin' at it with awed astonishment.

We could of stayed right there all day, jest admirin' all that water, but we got pretty hungry and walked two or three miles along a big avenue on which automobiles went whizzin' so fast we had to clutch at our hats to keep 'em from bein' snatched off by the wind.

Finally we reached a building which was as high as Kerry Mountain. It said on it HOTEL—so we figured this would be a pretty good place to fill our stomachs, which had commenced to rumble.

Standin' by the door was a big tall man which must of been anyway a general, accordin' to all the gold trappin's and brass buttons on his uniform. He was a dignified-lookin' gent with a long curlin' mustache and didn't seem

to be doin' anything in particular besides inhalin' the early morning air.

"How d'ye do, stranger!" said One-card, very polite. "We're new to this here town and I wonder if you'd mind tellin' us where we could find an eatin'-place. We sorta wandered away from the Main Street and had to sleep in Andrew Jackson's Park."

THE general didn't look very proud to make our acquaintance. He sighted down at us along his nose; then he struck up a military attitude.

"Dash it all!" he uttered with deep contempt. "This place isn't a Wild West Show, my man. You cawn't take that nawsty beast inside!"

I backed up a couple of steps, feelin' like a wet cat.

But not so with Silurian Smith. The old boy resented any insults cast on his beloved hound. He advanced toward the general, all bristly around the edges.

"I fit in the Civil War, alongside of Sherman," he declared, his little gooseberry eyes flashin' fire, "and I'll take that dorg inside your dang' teepee ef I feel so inclined! Get in hyar, Grover!"

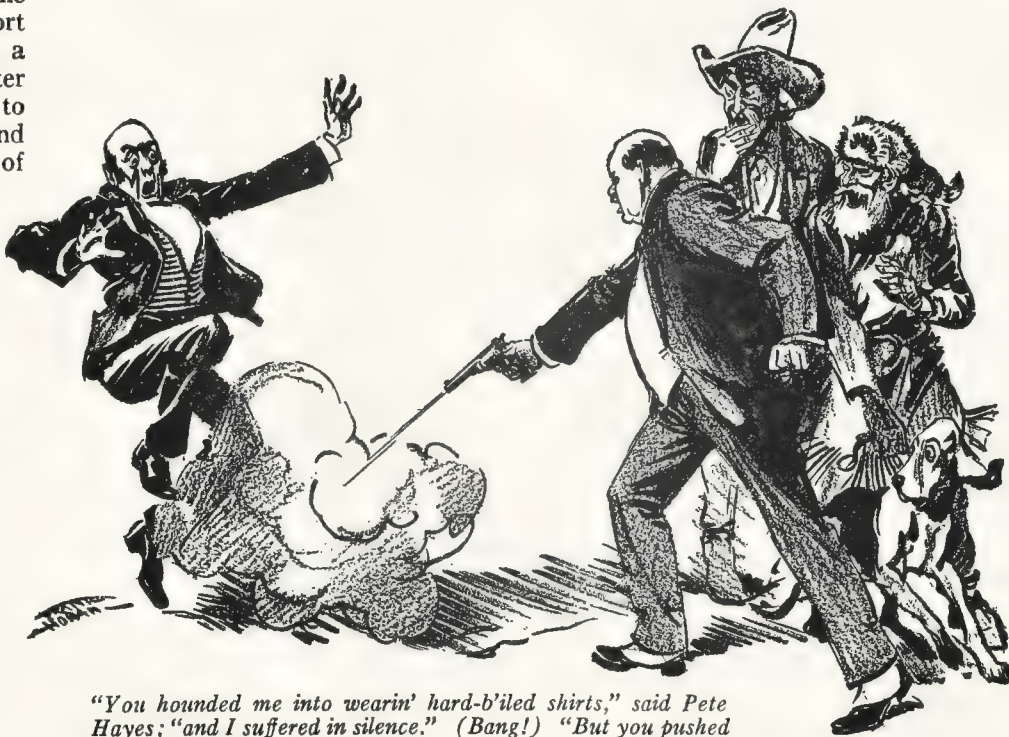
He pushed the door open and held it for the hound to go in. Whereupon the general grabbed Silurian by the back of the neck, jerked him away from the door and fetched Grover Cleveland a savage and re-

soundin' kick on the rump. The old dog let out a howl like a drawn-out blast on a trombone; then he whirled and sank his teeth into the leg of the general—who right away forgot his dignity and started jumpin' up and down and yellin' for help. But Grover wasn't a dog to nurse a grudge for very long. He turned loose of his holt, sat on his sawed-off tail, lookin' innocent, and lickin' his chops, and paid no more attention to the yowlin' general.

People began pourin' out of the hotel and we set out down the avenue at a lope. We had covered about a quarter of a mile when we heard somebody behind us yellin': "Hey boys! Just a minute, boys! Stop, damn it!"

I took a look over my shoulder and saw a fat gentleman runnin' his best tryin' to catch up with us. I figured it wouldn't do us no harm to pause a minute and find out what the fellow wanted. He drew alongside as we sort of slowed up, but he was so winded he could only gasp and mop his face with a hankchief. And then One-card yelled:

"Pete Hayes, you old pi'sonous centipede, how the hell did you get here?"



"You hounded me into wearin' hard-b'iled shirts," said Pete Hayes; "and I suffered in silence." (Bang!) "But you pushed me too far, you owly-eyed, spinach-eatin' buzzard!"

Sure enough, it was Pete Hayes, and we hadn't set eye on him for fifteen years! Why that fellow at one time used to be the wildest ripsnorter south of Abilene and it was quite a shock to see him standin' there when we thought sure he had been hung long ago. He was all dressed up like a senator at a barbecue, with diamonds in his necktie and a pair of them there canvas ankle things,—spats they call 'em,—whereas when we knew him he had only two shirts to his name and no coat.

"Boys," he panted, "I was drivin' by the hotel when I saw you run out and I hollered at George, my chauffeur: 'Turn around, George! By gad, there's One-card Harrigan and Cold-deck Scully!' But the damn' fool was too slow and I leaped out to catch you. The way you was gallopin' you would of been dashin' through the Loop in another five minutes! Here's George now!"

A BIG shiny automobile with brass trimmin's and silver doodads hangin' everywhere on it like on a Christmas tree drove up and stopped.

"Get in, boys!" boomed Pete Hayes. "Gosh, it's good to see you again!"

We all mounted the thing, draggin' Grover Cleveland behind us, and went hummin' down the avenue so fast the scenery looked like a blur.

"Pete," I said, "you sure look fat and prosperous!"

"Yeah!" said Pete. "I got more money than I know what to do with. I married one of them there heiresses. But I'll tell you, as I recollect the old days and see you here, I feel kinda sad. I aint a happy man, boys!"

Then we told him about us settlin' down in Broom Tail Gulch and how One-card had become engaged and we come to Chicago to meet his *fiancé*. We related that we had lost the paper with Miss Alfrieda's address on it, and about Grover Cleveland gettin' away and runnin' clear to Andrew Jackson's Park with us after him in the taxis cab, and how we had become wrecked and camped out all night, and about the hound bitin' the general in front of the hotel.

Before we got to the end, Pete was laughin' fit to be tied and the tears run down his fat cheeks in streams. He said we was still the same old boys he used to know and that we must go to one of them Don't-Speak-Louds and have a drink. And before night come we had went in and out of I don't know how many Don't-Speak-Louds, tellin' our story in each one of 'em and I never heard folks laugh so hard in all my life.

Old Pete Hayes got pretty wabbly and we had to help him along when we wasn't ridin' in the limousine. Silurian felt right lively. He walked along the streets leadin' Grover Cleveland and singin', "Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?" at the top of his squeaky voice. Big crowds followed us along from place to place and One-card forgot all about Miss Alfrieda and started givin' his imitation of a pack of coyotes callin' to each other that they had found a dead horse.

"Boys," said Pete, "you got to come out and stay at my place. My wife is a hard woman; she thinks I'm lower than a snake, but by the Lord, I'm tired of all her damn' teas and fancy doin's. Teas! I'm a wild wolf from Powder River! Yeeeeeeee! I aint never gonna drink another cup of tea! Come along, boys, and stand by me. I'm a man, by chowder, and not a dad-busted tea-drinker! And she'll most likely be asleep and won't hear us come in."

IT was about midnight when we staggered out of the limousine in front of a building which looked more like a courthouse than anybody's home.

"S-h-h-h!" whispered Pete. "Everybody is bedded down for the night. We'll go up to my room."

We snuck into the house and walked up a flight of stairs, very cautious not to make any noises. Pete's room was like a convention hall, with carpets all over the floor and a bed which resembled a covered wagon. He had his old saddle hung on the wall and a couple of rifles and six-shooters over a fireplace. We had not been in there five minutes when the door opened without warning and a horse-faced man entered.

"Did you ring, sir?" said this *hombre*, givin' us strangers a sour look like he wanted to say, "Now, what is it comin' to?"

Pete went over to the fireplace, and took one of the six-shooters from his peg. Then he said to the horse-faced man: "No, you jaundice-eyed, snoopin' flunky, I didn't ring! But since you're here I am gonna do something which I allus have wanted to do since the first time I set my eyes on your reverend features. Porterhouse, can you dance?"

"Dance, sir?" asked Porterhouse, not lookin' any too happy.

"Yes, dance! I want you to do the pigeon-wing for my friends here. They come all the way from Broom Tail Gulch to see you perform the pigeon-wing!"

"An unusual request, sir," sputtered Porterhouse. "Er—if I may say so, sir. I hardly think, sir . . . I regret that er—the wing of a pigeon is not among my accomplishments. I'm sorry, sir!"

"You don't need to feel bad about it," put in Pete, flourishin' his pistol. "Because you're gonna start learnin'. The fundamental principle of the pigeon-wing is to stay off the ground as much as possible. Like *this*—" Sayin' which, he fired the six-shooter and nicked the toe of Porterhouse's right shoe with a .45 slug. Pete used to be a pretty good shot and I guess he had not lost his skill.

PORTERHOUSE let out an awful screech and leaped into the air like a bouncin' mountain-goat. He no more than lit again when another bullet plopped close to his left hoof and he took off once more, yowlin' like a caught wildcat.

"You hounded me into wearin' hard-b'iled shirts," said Pete Hayes. "And I suffered in silence, like a lamb weaned from his mother." *Bang!* "You poured gallons of tea down my neck, till now I got a stomik like a balloon." *Bang!* "You snooped and told on me and drunk up my whisky, you bald-faced eunuch!" *Bang!* "You thought you could hound me into takin' up your snooty airs. You laughed at me behind my back and figured I was only a poor iggerant sheep with no sand in my craw." *Bang!* "But you pushed me too far, you owly-eyed, spinach-eatin' buzzard!" *Snap!* "Damn it, this dang' gun is empty! Wait till I get me another one!"

But Porterhouse decided that he would not wait for the second stanza. He had pigeon-winged all he was goin' to—and he took out down the hall, his coat-tails stickin' straight out behind him, and lettin' out loud yelps of distress.

Pete Hayes beamed with joy. "Boys," he said to us, "Seein' you free and happy like you are, has made a new man of me. I been wantin' to squelch that rat-eyed buttlin' *hombre* for years and never could get up enough nerve. But now I've declared myself and we're goin' to celebrate!"

He stepped over to a big cubbord, brought out a fancy bottle and some glasses and poured out four drinks. "Here's to the old days on the range!" he called. "Drink up, boys!"

A cold voice spoke from the door.

"Peter!"

We all turned and beheld a large female with a head of

hair like a snow-covered haystack. She was wrapped in a pink silk night-shirt trimmed with fur, and carried a little hairy dog under one arm. With her free hand she held up a law-net, as they call a pair of spectacles mounted on a stick. Her mouth was pinched tight and she glared at us like a hangin' judge would at a pore horse-stealin' Mexican.

Pete Hayes put down his glass. He looked like his freedom had already began to wear off. "Phoebe," he said, tryin' to smile, "these boys are old friends of mine. Boys, I want you to meet Mrs. Hayes."

"Glad t'meet you, marm!" said Silurian, advancin' with his hand stickin' out.

The lady gave Silurian a look through her law-net. "Chawmed!" she spat out. Silurian backed up, feelin' like a squashed potato-bug. We had started behind Silurian but we stopped right quick and stayed anchored to our tracks.

"Peter," said Mrs. Hayes, "I want you to know that you and your Wild West friends have so terrorized the butler that the poor man is lying downstairs now in a dead swoon!"

Pete almost busted out with joy, but he caught himself in time.

"It was only in fun, dear," he explained. "I never really aimed the gun at him at all. Lord knows I could of blasted his ears off if I'd wanted to!"

And then Mrs. Hayes blowed up.

"You bandit!" she yelled, puttin' her dog down and brandishin' her law-net like a tomyhawk. "You low-lived vulgarian! Your imbecility is incomprehensible! Oooooh, why did I marry a roughneck! Ooooooh, I can bear it no longer! You so-and-so and so-and-so and ecetery. . . . Get out of my sight and take these impossible persons with you! And that horrible mongrel!"—meanin' by that Grover Cleveland.

"Now, now, now!" put in Pete. "You see, dear—"

Grover had become curious about the little hairy dog. He started sniffin' at him and waggin' his tail in a friendly manner. But the little dog mistook these friendly advances and made a vicious snap at Grover's dew-lap.

Grover Cleveland growled; then he cuffed the little hairy dog with his paw and sent him spinnin' and yowlin' clear across the room.

"Midget!" cried Mrs. Hayes. "Ooooooh, the beast will kill him! Come here, Midget!"

Midget circled around the bed with his tail between his legs and slid to first base, behind his mistress' night-shirt. Grover tried to cut him off, but he got tangled up with a loose rug and he upset Mrs. Hayes, who hit the floor on the wrong side of her lap with a hollow boom, almost squashin' Midget flat.

"Dear, dear, dear!" clucked Pete Hayes.

He stared at his fallen wife, a wild look of horror in his eyes. "Let's go, boys!" he yelled. "It's every man for himself now!"

Silurian caught Grover Cleveland, we picked up our belongin's and darted through the door behind Pete, not even takin' the time to bid Mrs. Hayes good-by.

A half an hour later the four of us were sittin' in a hotel room downtown.

Pete was rollin' his eyes at the ceiling and wringin' his hands. "My Gawd," he kept whisperin'. "My Gawd!"

"Well," said One-card, "aint you a free man now?"

"You don't know Mrs. Hayes!" said Pete. "She'll make my life a livin' hell!"

One-card stood his feet spread apart, his rovin' eye flashin' around the room like a searchlight, while the other one remained fixed on Pete, like he was thinkin' hard about somethin'.

"Hum-m-m," he mused. "Hum-m-m, I see!"

It was Silurian, the next morning, who was the first to sight Miss Alfrieda Cowthorne. She was across the street from us, walkin' along with another lady. We were fixin' to enter a restaurant.

"Thar she is!" yelled Silurian. "Hey! Hyar's One-card! Yoo-hoo!" But Silurian suddenly found a large paw lodged among his whiskers.

"Hey?" he asked, turnin'. "What—"

"Never mind what," said One-card. "It aint polite to yell at ladies on the street, Silurian. A man of yore age should ought to know better!"

"But," sputtered Silurian, "but—but—"

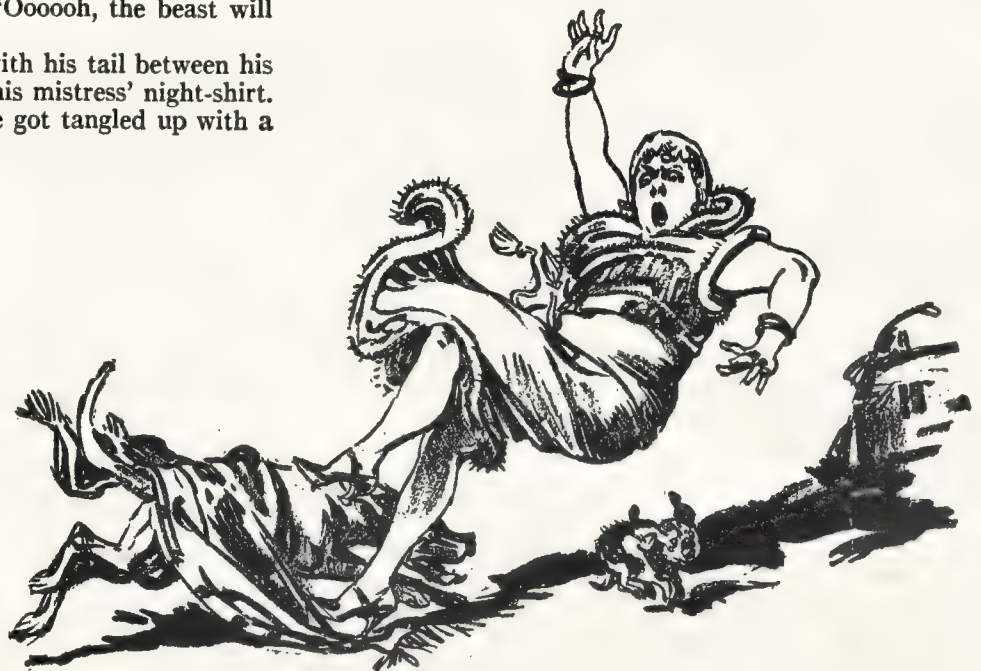
One-card never said another word. He entered the restaurant and we followed him, almost struck dumb from surprise.

A WEEK later in Broom Tail Gulch, One-card Harri-gan and me stood up to the bar in Larry Schoonover's confectionery store and Larry says to us:

"Boys, I hear Miss Alfrieda come back from Chicago today. And when Hank Tucker asked her if she wanted to say anything about her wedding, for the *X-Ray*, she said something which sounded to Hank like, 'Go to hell, you old meddler!'" Larry winked at me. "I don't reckon she said that, though," he added. "A nice woman like her."

One-card gulped his drink.

"Well," he drawled, "I don't know . . . Now if you was to ask me, I'd reply that she said it, and maybe worse. Women can get pretty rough sometimes, Larry. You'd be surprised! Fill 'em up, Larry!"



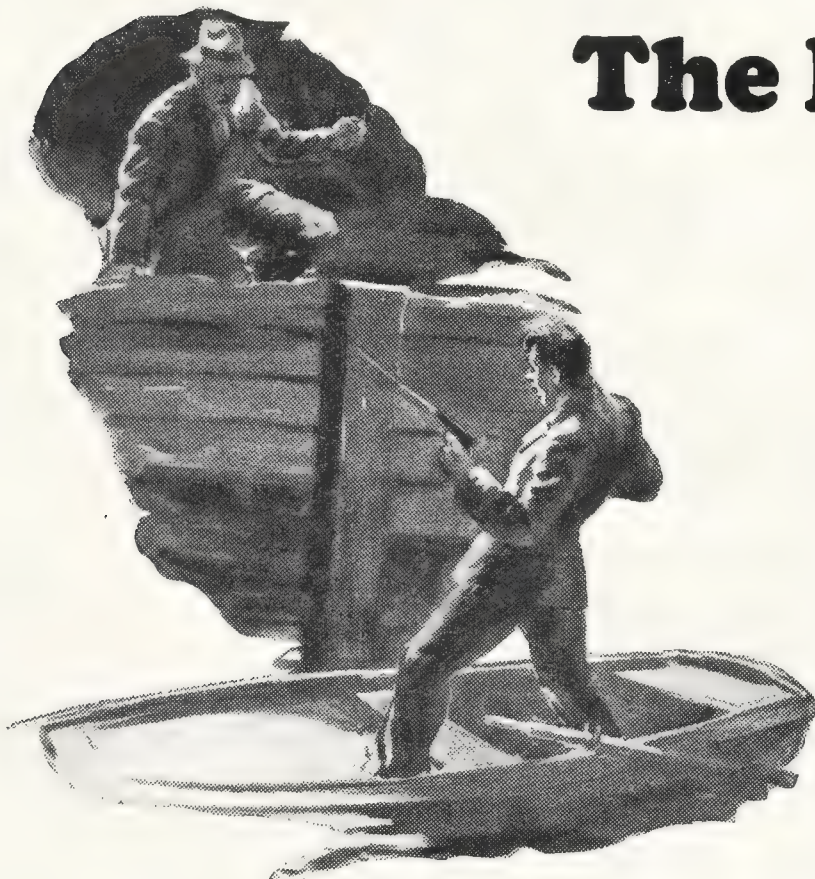
Midget, his tail between his legs, slid to first base. Grover tried to cut him off, but got tangled up with a loose rug and upset Mrs. Hayes.

REAL EXPERIENCES

The Dog Watch

By **Douglas J. Peck**

This newspaper reporter encountered dangerous consequences in playing Good Samaritan to a crook.



AFTER midnight, at police headquarters, the reporter on an opposition paper and I worked together. Because I was the younger, I was chosen for "leg-work." If a flash came in on something that looked like a story, I went out on it, while Bill held the fort at headquarters.

It was one o'clock on the morning in question when a flash came in that burglars were operating in a chain-store in Amherst Street, in the northwestern or Black Rock part of the city. I hopped in a machine with the night captain of detectives, the driver, and two plain-clothes men. With siren shrieking, we started on the four-mile dash to the scene.

Burglars had been in the store all right, but they weren't there when we arrived. After assuring himself that the safe had not been drilled and "loaded," the captain, with his men and myself, piled into the squad-car and started back to headquarters at a more leisurely gait.

At Niagara and Brace Streets we passed two machines standing at the curb without parking lights. One was a light delivery truck, the other a sedan bearing a taxi license-number. Both cars were deserted.

Brace Street leads from Niagara Street down a sharp incline, passes under the New York Central Railroad tracks and emerges on the towpath of the barge canal, which parallels the railroad. Between the underpass and the towpath was a lone arc-light.

As we piled from the police machine and started to examine the abandoned cars, some one glanced down Brace Street. Silhouetted in the square frame of light showing beneath the railroad were four figures, walking slowly up the hill. The police captain waved us to the shelter of the cars and there we waited while the

quartet approached. As the men rounded the corner of Niagara Street and started toward their cars, the captain, detectives and driver stepped out with drawn pistols.

The men surrendered without protest and a quick search revealed they were unarmed. Two of them were recognized as men recently released from Auburn Prison; the third was a taxi-driver of shady repute; the fourth was for the moment unrecognized. The captain decided to take them to headquarters for questioning, holding them on the charge of parking without lights.

They seemed uneasy and more than willing to start. One of the detectives glanced down Brace Street. Another man was toiling up the short, sharp grade with a sack over his shoulder. The sleuth started to race down the hill, calling on the man to surrender. The latter, after one frightened glance, turned and fled back toward the canal. The detective gained on him rapidly.

Suddenly the fugitive wheeled, revolver in hand, and fired one shot. The detective pitched forward and turned several complete somersaults down the hill. The fleeing man jumped over the edge of the canal, apparently into the water.

The captain and remaining detective left their prisoners in charge of the police driver and started down the hill. The captain was a sufferer from fallen arches and could move but slowly. I was close behind the second detective as he ran toward the fallen officer. The fallen man gained his feet unaided as we approached. He had tried to duck when the fugitive fired, and had tripped. He was uninjured.

We three ran to the canal bank and found a man in a flat-bottomed boat, trying to pull himself along the stonework, while remaining in the shadow of the bank. He met the demand for surrender with several shots.

The detectives returned the fire. In the meantime a precinct lieutenant and three men who happened to be close at hand in a prowling car, heard the shooting and joined forces with the detectives. Forty or fifty shots had been fired when the man stood up in the boat and tossed his revolver onto the canal bank in token of surrender. He was told to climb out of the boat.

"I can't. I'm wounded," he replied, and slid one hand under his coat on the left side, indicating the place of his injury. One of the detectives told me to help him out of the boat. I leaned over the bank—and as I did, the light from the arc behind me struck another revolver,

which lay glistening on the bottom of the boat. I started to cry out that he had another gun, when the hand beneath his coat flashed out, gripping a third revolver. He fired point-blank in my face.

I was angry all over. To offer my help to a wounded man and then be shot at!

The battle started anew, while I—reckless of danger from bullets fired by the desperado in front of me and detectives behind me—hunted feverishly for a rock or club or something to hurl at the man who had double-crossed me. The firing died down—stopped. The police had exhausted their ammunition.

The gunman calmly sat down and started to row across the canal, laughing at the officers.

It was then the captain reached the spot. His revolver, a long-barreled .38-caliber, was swinging in his hand. I snatched it and wheeled to the bank. In the army I had qualified as a pistol expert. I cocked the revolver and

sighted at the shadow which was the disappearing boat and man. I fired three shots—slowly—deliberately.

He told us afterward that the first shot struck the boat at the water-line. The second knocked an oar from his hand and when he leaned over to recover it, the third went through his side.

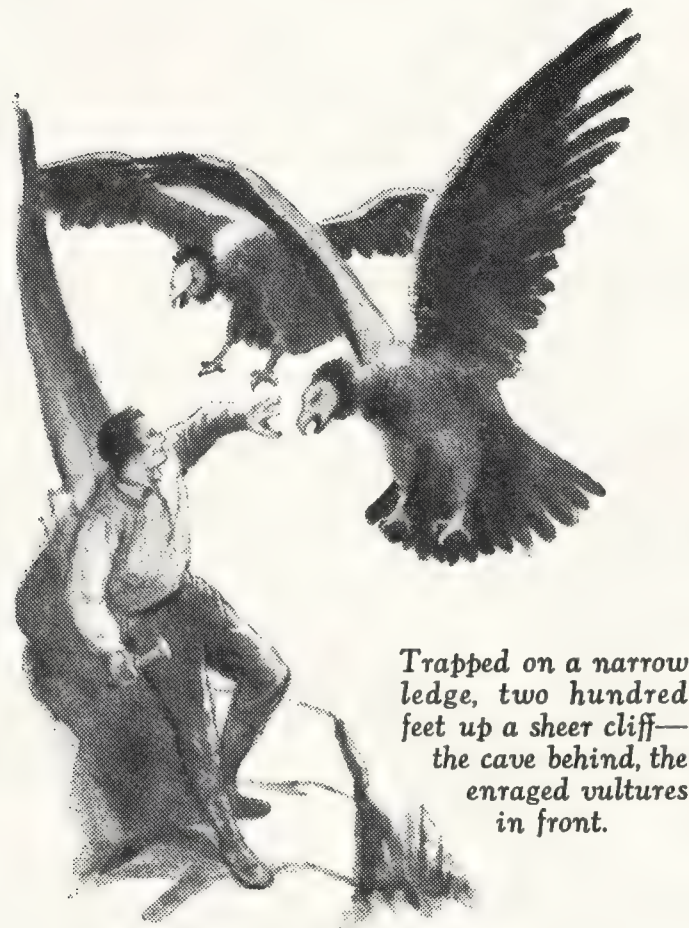
It developed that the five men had hoped to bring in some liquor from Canada, but had failed to make connections. Four walked ahead to see that the cars were all right, while the boatman brought up the rear, carrying their revolvers in a sack. . . .

In the course of a conversation *en route* to the hospital with the wounded man, he gathered that I was a newspaper reporter and not a policeman. He registered disgust, then laughed.

"To think I had the law outsmarted and then let a lousy reporter plug me! Next time I'll bump the newspaper guy first and play tag with the coppers afterward!"

Caught by Condors

By H. H. Dunn



Trapped on a narrow ledge, two hundred feet up a sheer cliff—the cave behind, the enraged vultures in front.

MORE than twenty years ago Diego Ramirez, a half-breed Mexican Indian, brought me word that a pair of very large and very black *zopilotes* (vultures) were nesting in a cave in the Santa Ana River cañon, back of the village of Yerba, Orange County, California. He assured me these birds were much larger than the ordinary turkey buzzards, and that each of the pair had a white spot under each wing, sure identification-marks of the California condor.

The California condor, rival of the Andean condor in size and ferocity, has a wing-spread of nine to ten feet and a weight of seventy-five to one hundred pounds. Only about fifty pairs exist today in the remote mountain ranges of California, where they and their eggs are protected by

the State. The egg is valued at one thousand dollars and the skin at two hundred and fifty dollars. But at this time, killing a condor or taking their eggs was not against the law.

Late afternoon of a day early in March, some two months after the stolid little *Indio* had brought me word of the vultures, I made my way up the Santa Ana gorge alongside the river, toward the mouth of the side cañon, in which he said the nest-cave was to be found. Day was turning to night, and it was high time for me to find dry wood and make camp. I shot a rabbit, and by the time I found shelter under a large sycamore tree, the velvet twilight was slipping like the curtain of a theater over the world for at least a day. Alone on a little shelf on the mountain-side, I pulled the pan of rabbit off the coals, swung the iron spike holding the coffee-pot over the heat, and turned for a moment to look down the gorge.

Just then, out of the lower shades, black as night itself, came a huge bird—moving slowly, but with effortless power, following the winding of the cañon, bound for the heart of the range. I knew it instantly for a condor, one of the great birds which had been comparatively plentiful along the California coast ranges in my boyhood days in the late nineties. But this was the first I had seen for more than twenty years.

The following day I moved up the cañon some two miles, and met the condor coming down about nine o'clock, after the fog had cleared out of the western gorges. That night found me two miles farther into the mountains; this time I was rewarded by seeing the great bird, after passing my camp, turn up a side cañon, into which I followed it until I came to a sheer cliff rising more than two hundred feet and marking the dead end of the gorge. Diagonally across the face of this cliff ran a crack or fissure only a few inches wide at the top, but spreading to three or four feet about

fifty feet from the summit, where a ledge projected from the front of the cavern so formed.

That evening I ate a cold dinner—risking no fire to frighten the great vulture—and while I watched the sun's last light moving slowly from the crag, I saw the condor come up the cañon, alight on the ledge, smooth its feathers, and drop its naked head lower than its shoulders, searching with piercing eyes the depths of the cañon. While it sat motionless, another vulture, of almost equal size, dropped down over the southern wall of the cañon and settled on the same ledge.

Here was a sight few men have seen, and still less ever will see—two of the last of the largest birds that fly, still living in the northern hemisphere, but now become shyer and more retreating than the tiniest warbler that hides itself in the thickest of our city parks. Powerful enough to defeat a full-grown bald eagle, strong enough to carry away an entire sheep, with wings equaled by no other flyer save possibly the Andean condor, this vulture's biological misfortune of rearing but one young every year, has unfitted it for the combat with civilization. Beyond this, two years are required for the young condor to attain maturity, to be able to fly well and to obtain its own food. In other words, growth is too slow for the condor to survive.

Ten miles back of me was my horse, left at a mountaineer's cabin. Fifty miles farther back was my home. But a week later I was at the condor cliff, fully equipped with ropes, flashlight, stout leather clothing, helmet and non-breakable goggles, prepared to see what was inside the cave. A young half-breed Indian boy was with me.

On the morning of the day after I arrived, both condors left the cave as soon as the fog cleared out of the gorge, which lay late in shadow, owing to its facing westward. By noon, however, I had gained the top of the cliff, with two hundred feet of light but strong line around my waist and shoulders. I dropped one end of this over the cliff. Manuel at the base made it fast to two hundred and fifty feet of one-inch manila rope, which I hauled up hand-over-hand, anchoring the end of it to a foot-thick pine tree some distance back from the edge of the cliff.

Putting a flashlight and an extra battery in my pocket, I went over the edge, and, feet and hands wrapped about the line, lowered myself slowly to the ledge in front of the cave. This shelf of solid stone I found to be about four feet wide and some ten or twelve feet long, broken back nearly to the cliff wall in places, but in general quite solid and strong enough to bear my weight with no signs of crumbling. Inside, the bottom of the fissure cave was rounded, as if it had once been occupied by a boulder of several tons which had fallen out, or been hurled out by an earthquake. There was no sign of life about the opening.

With an opening about four feet high, the cave ran back, maintaining its size, for an indefinite distance. Letting go the rope, I dropped to my hands and knees on the ledge, and with the flashlight turned on, crept inside. The odor outside the cavern was strong; inside it was almost overpowering, though from the entrance no sign of a nest was in sight. The dark tunnel led straight into the rock, farther than I could see with the aid of the light. Chunks of decaying meat cluttered the way.

As I paused to move one of these remnants of a vulture feast, there came a sudden hiss, like that of an enraged python, from the dark interior, and instantly following it a black body, with wings and feet propelling it, hurtled past me out of the cave entrance and off the ledge, without halting for the customary take-off of these huge birds when they leave a perch. Quite apparently a young condor had been at home; but not in a mood to receive visitors.

Fifteen feet farther I came on the nest, a rude hollow in the cave floor, quite as Nature had left it, without lining

of any kind. In it lay one huge egg, about four and one-half inches long by two and one-half inches in diameter at its thickest part. Under the light of the electric torch it appeared white, with a grayish-green overcast. Larger than a swan's egg, and unmarked, it seemed to be quite fresh, and evidently incubation had not commenced.

In the sand and dust which ages of time and the processes of gravity had collected in the depression in the cavern was the mark of the body of the young condor, which had been lying close to the egg, though not over it. A few wing-quills, shed by the adult birds, one of them more than eighteen inches long, were lying on the floor of the cave, but there was no evidence of even an attempt at nest building. The cave ended a few feet farther back, where earth and small stones, fallen down the fissure, formed the rear wall.

I spent the next half hour in studying the cave, the rude hollow which served for a nest and the rare and valuable egg, which I eventually packed in cotton in a heavy tin can that I had brought inside my thick shirt. The great quills, whose use by the miners of 1849 as receptacles for gold dust led to the destruction of hundreds of the condors, also went with me.

By the time I had completed this inspection, late afternoon had come. I intended to "walk up" the face of the cliff, aided by the rope, throw down the latter and then make my way back to camp in the cañon; but just as I reached the entrance, and before I moved out, I saw the rope, drawn taut, and fully twenty feet out from the ledge.

Glancing down, I saw that Manuel, thinking that it would be easier for me to slide down the rope if it were anchored, had carried the free end back about twenty-five feet and made it fast with several turns around a growing tree. With the one-track mind of his kind, he never considered that I would have to get on the rope before I could slide down it—and there I was, high on the ledge in front of the condors' cave, with no way of reaching the rope, and no boy visible from my somewhat limited viewpoint just back of the entrance to the cavern.

I MOVED forward out of the cave mouth, my lips framing a shout to Manuel to release the rope—when a rushing roar filled my ears, something hit me on the head, and I fell back into the cave, very nearly "knocked out." For a few seconds, which seemed many minutes, I did not know just what had happened. Then there was another rushing roar, and a bird nearly four feet long, with a wingspread of at least nine feet, even with wings partly folded, lit on the ledge and started into the cave. It came to me with a rush that I was a prisoner of the condors; one of them, returning, had hit me at full speed with his great eight-inch beak, and if I did not succeed in reaching Manuel and the rope, I was in for a very unpleasant evening.

The huge vulture's naked, wrinkled head, as large as that of a wolf-hound and equipped with a beak capable of tearing the skin from a living horse, lowered until the fierce eyes looked directly at me as I crouched about three feet back of the entrance. With a hiss like steam escaping, and wings raised in an arch over its back, the great black bird advanced, its jaws opening and closing, its mandibles clicking like the opening and shutting of a huge pair of pincers.

My senses returned just in time; whipping the electric torch from my belt, I turned the full glare of the light into the bird's face. Had I been out in the open, this doubtless would have had no effect, but coming from the dark interior of the cavern, the brilliant light at once dazzled and frightened the vulture, which instantly settled back and flapped its wings, but did not flee. I moved the light closer, waving it about, but bringing it back always to focus on the great vicious eyes.

Caught by Condors

Thus, working the light back and forth in circles and thrusts I advanced slowly and warily toward the vulture, which alternately thrust at the moving light with its beak, and retreated a step or two as I shoved the lamp forward. At last, taking a chance on my hand being quicker than the condor's beak, I thrust the long-barreled flashlight directly against the bill. This was too much for the puzzled bird, and the vulture nearly fell backward off the ledge in its haste to escape. At the cave-mouth it plunged from the rock shelf, catching itself instantly in a wide swoop, and rising a hundred yards down the gorge.

I moved as rapidly as possible out on the ledge, rose to my feet, and dropped back just in time to avoid another blow on the head from the condor's mate, which apparently had been hanging aloft, awaiting the result of the first bird's return to the cave. With the roar of an airplane motor, the great wings fanned me, and the huge body of the vulture shot past, to dip and rise and join its mate, which, by this time, had returned and was beating noiselessly to and fro in front of the cavern.

I rolled my body back into the cave, and peered out over the edge in an effort to locate Manuel. There he stood, hands on hips, mouth agape, watching my battle with the vultures, the rope still lashed around the tree. Putting my hands trumpet-fashion to my mouth, I shouted to him to free the line; but it was not until the third call that he released it; even then he stood holding the free end until I made him understand what I wanted.

As he finally freed the rope, both condors swooped at once, one from each side of the cliff, apparently excited by the motion of the falling rope. This time, they struck with their talons, instead of their beaks, hurling their great bodies, weighing sixty pounds or more, black and evil-smelling, directly at my head. I struck upward with the flashlight, hit one of the birds, and the steel tube was knocked as cleanly from my hand as if hit by a heavy club.

I WAS weaponless, with about four feet of ledge to clear before I could seize the rope and slide down it! Even with my hands on the heavy line, I was not free from danger until I had reached the ground, for, as I slid, I still would be an open and defenseless target for the great vultures' beaks and claws. Meanwhile, I had to protect that precious egg, packed in cotton in the tin can inside my shirt. Had I a gun, I would not have used it, for I was planning to return the next spring and obtain another egg—though as it happens I never have gone back to that nest-cave.

Rising to my knees, then to my feet, while the condors winnowed the air a little above the rim of the cliff, or at a level with it, apparently momentarily frightened by the blow from the flashlight, I leaped for the rope, caught it, locked it between my feet and under one arm, and slid for life. Fast as I was able to go, due to my leather coat and heavy boots, the condors were faster. Like the fabled thunderbolt one fell, hit me a glancing blow—fortunately on the shoulder, instead of the head—and rose out of the gorge as easily and lightly as a feather blown on a wandering upward current of air. Then came the other, scarcely a score of feet behind the first, moving with equal speed. I threw my free arm above my head. The talons of one foot gripped my sleeve at the shoulder and literally tore it from my coat, almost taking my arm with it.

In another second I was safe on the ground, my arm numb with pain, my head throbbing where the first blow had fallen, and my shoulder so sore that for weeks I could use neither it nor the injured arm. I looked up, half expecting another attack. Towering above the cliff, the pair of vultures, now joined by the young bird, wheeled in tremendous circles. From the claws of one trailed the sleeve of my leather coat.

The Duel

A strange document of the war, showing man's undying urge for hand-to-hand combat.

By Spencer Grant

THE real terror of the war never struck home to me until I was detailed as a runner through a desolate area of the Argonne. When soldiers are in the trenches there is a companionship and team-work that makes you forget your ordinary feelings. But when you are utterly alone, making your way through a strange, ghostly woods, with shells bursting all around you, then you become just a sacred human being—and it's awful.

In October, 1918, after the Americans had broken through north of Verdun, the 33rd Division was holding up its end in a determined struggle for the possession of the Meuse River. I was a member of the 104th Field Artillery, supporting this infantry outfit. The infantry had intrenched on the top of a long hill south of the river, which was quite narrow at this point.

A lieutenant and two corporals from our battery were stationed with the infantry to collect firing data. I was a private, and during this period it was my duty to act as runner. I had to make a daily trip from the battery to the front line, collect the data, and return.

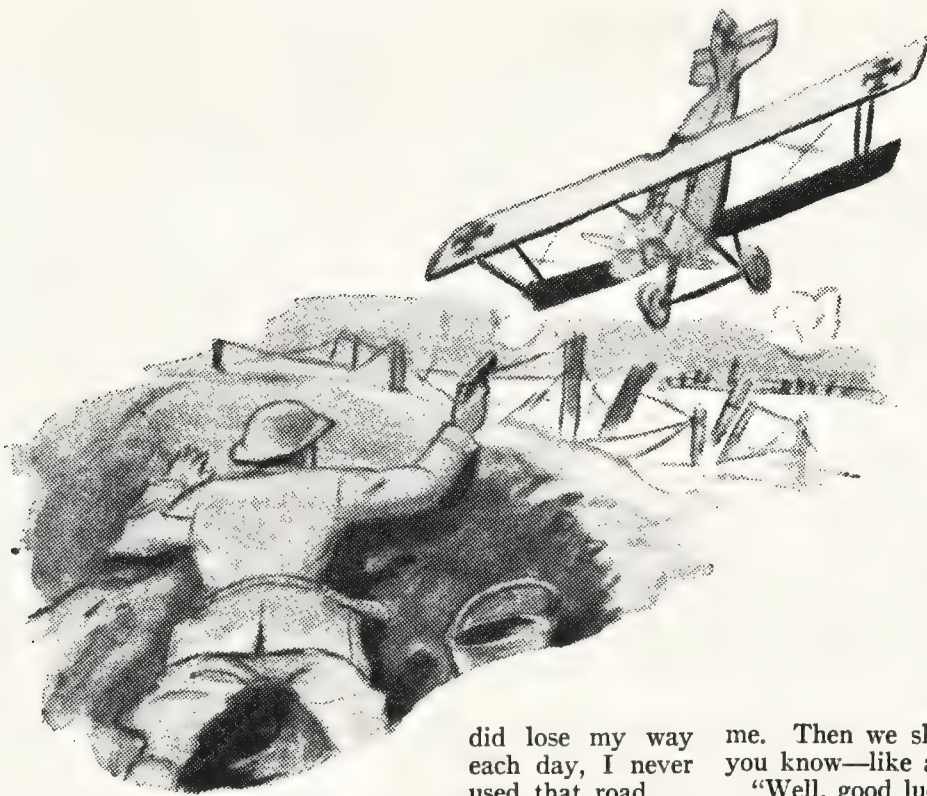
The stretch of ground I passed through had been bitterly contested. It was one of those typical wastelands, pock-marked with shell-holes and strewn with upturned trees and debris. The road leading from the front line to the battery was almost constantly under German fire, so I was forced to pick my way through the open country.

In the roundabout route I used, it was about six miles. I started at dawn the first day and the trip became the most terrible experience of my life. To begin with, the torn-up land made the going rough. As I came nearer the trench, the bursting shells sent me scuttling into shell-holes, where I would hug the earth, feeling that I alone was the center of the attack of the German army. Being alone in this gloomy forest made me fear-conscious.

Near the trench I passed around a deserted town, half-hidden in a haze of bursting shell-fire. I had to follow near the road now, to keep from losing my way. I was startled when I suddenly heard the sound of an auto horn, and looking up the road, saw an ambulance bouncing and skidding toward me over the shell-riddled road. They were driving at a great rate of speed and the machine was being held to the road by masterful hands.

As they passed me I saw a driver, two helpers, and a couple of stretchers bearing bandaged men. Before the roar of the motor died away, my breath was cut off by the scream of a shell. Instinctively I flung myself to the earth away from the road. The earth throbbed and a mighty crash assaulted my ear-drums. I turned around and looked toward the ambulance. Where it had been was now a billowing black cloud, through which shot pieces of debris and parts of human bodies.

I forced myself to go over to them, but there wasn't a single body intact. On a board there was a rough scrawl in red paint: "This road is under direct fire; turn off." Despite the risk of losing my way I turned off. Although I



did lose my way each day, I never used that road.

I delivered my burlap sack of iron

rations to the men, took their reports, and started back. This was much worse than the trip up, because I knew what I was going through, and I knew it was doubtful if I made it at all. It's not easy to start on a journey alone, when you know that Death is constantly close to you.

To make it harder, the slope leading away from the trench was in direct view of the German guns. I had the unique distinction of being sniped by a German field-piece, corresponding in size to a French .75. I negotiated this stretch on my hands and knees, then bolted into the woods. I picked my way through barbed wire and climbed over tree-trunks, plowed through bogs, and finally emerged from that part of the woods into an open stretch of ground.

Immediately I came into this clearing, which was about five hundred yards across, I saw a plane swooping directly down. By the peculiar hum of the motor I recognized it as a German, and hurried back to the woods. It came straight down, like a swallow. As it shot toward the earth I realized it was not coming toward me, but was farther across the field.

Not more than twenty-five feet from the ground it glided out straight and let out a volley of machine-gun fire. That dry crackle sent shudders down me, even though it was three city blocks away, but I couldn't imagine what it was shooting at.

The plane climbed swiftly, circled a few times, and swooped down again. Over the same spot it let out another machine-gun volley, and soared swiftly. It circled around until it reached a high altitude, then disappeared toward the American lines.

When I got to the point the plane had been firing over, I saw an American soldier still lying in a shell-hole. He turned over when he saw me and grinned, a grin I'll never forget. He was a corporal—a tall, lean, hard-bitten individual, with adventure in his eyes. His grin was sheepish boyish. He was just replacing an automatic in his holster, and hoisting a bucket.

"The bum nearly got me that time," he said grimly.

"What's it all about?" I asked.

Then he told this weird yet amusing tale:

"Another corporal and I are on a special detail at an observation post about a quarter of a mile from here. Around eleven o'clock every morning I go to a spring near here to get water. Three days ago, in this field, that Jerry plane dropped down on me and cut loose with his machine-gun, just like you saw this morning. Naturally I cracked away at him with my pistol. I let him have the whole clip of seven shots. Of course I didn't get him.

"Then I saw he was coming down again. I reloaded in a hurry, jumped back in the shell-hole, and we both banged away at each other. When the bird got right over me, he leaned out of the plane and waved at me." The corporal looked at me with that sheepish smile.

"I guess it was all in fun," he added, "so I waved back. Every morning since the same thing has happened. I think he hangs around up there until he sees

me. Then we shoot it out twice. It's sort of exciting, you know—like a duel."

"Well, good luck," I said.

All the way back, I thought of the ironic gallantry of this corporal. He looked like the old school of soldiers of fortune. He must have been near forty and his leathery face showed that he had been through some tough experiences. I could see that he was going out of his way now to hold his private warfare with this aviator; not out of any desire to decrease the German air-corps, but just for the sake of the fight. Apparently there was no enmity between the two. They were playing a reckless game, for high stakes. Then when I thought of the German flyer waving, and the corporal waving back, I laughed.

The next three days for me were relieved by looking forward to seeing the outcome of this duel. My own horrors were lessened a little when I pictured the corporal, fighting a plane with an automatic. Although I always reached this field by different routes, and invariably lost my way on the other side of it, I always managed to get there before the corporal had retired from the field.

Once, I saw the plane disappearing. The next day, I saw it make its second swoop, and actually witnessed that soldier, lying on his belly on the side of the hole, unhurriedly firing up at the airman, who was sprinkling the earth with lead. The third day I didn't see the plane, but I saw the corporal walking back toward his post.

He gave a wry grin and held up his bucket. The water was trickling through a bullet-hole. He said, with his grim humor. "I'll get him for that tomorrow."

"I hope you do," I said.

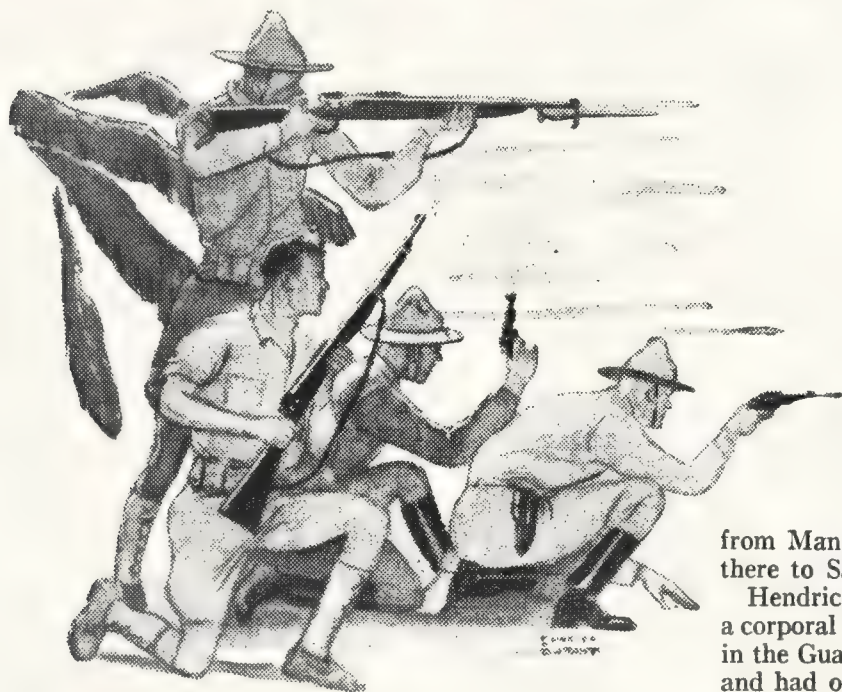
"Yeah, he's getting too close now."

As fast as I hurried the next day, when I emerged in the clearing, I saw neither the plane nor my friend. I plodded across, from habit going toward the shell-holes from which he usually battled his opponent. I first saw the bottom of the water-bucket, upturned, glistening in the morning sun.

Then I saw him, lying very still, face downward. His automatic was in his hand. As I neared him, I saw blood clotting around a bullet-hole below his left shoulder. Gingerly I turned him over. He was dead.

Luckily for me, the detail returned to the battery the next day, and I never had to make the trip again. I don't think I could have endured it with the memory of those blue eyes, still with a look of adventure in them, staring at the sun that morning when I turned him over.

Revolt In The Hills



Four white men defend their lives against two hundred maddened natives.

By **Boyd Coburn**

THE place was a little cluster of thatch-roofed huts on the banks of the Coco River in Nicaragua, near the border of Honduras. San Mateo is as good a name as any for it. The time was the tail end of the dry season in June, and in the wide sandy bed of the Coco there was only a mere trickle.

It was hot—not the dull, soggy heat of the seacoast, but that dry, scorching heat of the hills that can burn blisters through a shirt, heat that turns the world sere and yellow.

I had been to the opposite end of town to give a shot of emetin to a native who was down with a bad case of dysentery. Coming back toward our quarters along a crazy thoroughfare which bore the high-sounding title of "Calle de los Angeles," I was struck by its apparent lifelessness. Doors and windows of the huts on each side gaped dark and empty. Save for a mongrel lying motionless here and there against a wall, and only a bare scattering of *zopilotes*, not a living thing was to be seen.

Even at this time of day, there ordinarily would have been naked brown babies in every doorway and at least one bull-cart standing in the middle of the road, the beasts waiting patiently while their owner enjoyed his noon siesta. Of course all this was odd, but its significance did not occur to me at the time.

I was struck by the deserted-village aspect, but not violently. I knew subconsciously that something was amiss, but in the same manner in which I was aware of the surrounding hills—far away and unreal.

The quarters shared by the Guardia lieutenant and me constituted the only wooden house in the town. It was further distinguished by having at one time been white-washed, as evidenced by a few yellowed flecks still stubbornly adhering to the weathered boards. Hendricks, reclining with his boots on the desk and his back toward me, did not stir when I entered. He was a picture of lethargy. On the back porch (we boasted no patio) Meliton was padding barefoot to and from the lean-to kitchen, setting the table. After taking off my belt and pistol, I dropped

into a chair, fanning my burning face with my cap.

I had been in Nicaragua only two months, and barely a week of that in San Mateo. A chief-pharmacist mate, I had been transferred to the Guardia Nacional as a first lieutenant. I had been shipped from Managua, via Fokker transport to Ocotal and from there to San Mateo via mule-back.

Hendricks, tall, sandy-haired and pink-faced, formerly a corporal in the Marine Corps and now a second lieutenant in the Guardia, was in command of fifteen erstwhile *mozos* and had only recently taken over the town for the newly organized Guardia. The Marines had evacuated the week before and only two Marines, a corporal and a private, and a cart-load or two of supplies remained. These would go any day now that peace and quiet had been officially restored to the area.

Meliton paused in the doorway and told us chow was ready. On the oilcloth-covered table were the usual steaming dishes of red beans, rice, two kinds of meat (both tough), the inevitable tortillas and fried plantains.

We were eating slowly and without speaking, when suddenly—*blam-m-m!*—a rifle-shot broke the stillness like a cannon. Before the echo died away, hell broke loose—shots, cries and a general din and commotion. Hendricks and I exchanged a puzzled glance, and with a murmured, "What the—" ran to the street-door.

Down the street and coming toward us, was a crazy, milling mob of natives, on horseback and afoot, waving machetes, firing pistols and rifles and yelling bloody murder in general, and "*Muerte a los Yanquis!*" in particular.

"Come on—the quartel," said Hendricks quickly, and after grabbing our pistol-belts, we ran out the door and down the street, buckling our belts as we ran.

Behind us the noise grew louder. As we turned a bend and the quartel came in sight, Hendricks waved his pistol and shouted. He was answered from the quartel by a staccato burst of machine-gun fire. Some one on the upper gallery waved a strip of red bunting, shouting, "*Muerte a los Yanquis!*" From the quartel came another burst from the machine-gun and the bullets spattered around us.

We did not have a chance, where we were. The other side of the street seemed a mile away, and I felt like a slow-motion picture looks getting across, but we both did without being hit. We ran between two huts. Behind them we crossed a small, dry creek-bed, and were on a trail which led from the town.

We did not break any speed records; the trail was too irregular. We looked to the right and left, seeking any possible shelter, which might provide a strategic advantage. Behind us the racket continued. A quarter of a mile away, and off to the left, we saw a hut crowning a small hill which

was almost in the center of a large area of cleared land. In mute accord we plunged through the brush which bordered the trail and as we emerged into the field, we saw a khaki-clad figure come out of the hut and wave. It was one of the Marines. We beat it to that like food shot from guns, as Shakespeare or some one has said.

Both Marines were there. When the riot started, they had sized up the situation immediately and circled the town. Once on the trail, they had made for our present fortress. They both had rifles and plenty of ammunition.

The situation then was this: four white men, armed with two rifles and two automatic pistols, against two hundred maddened natives. Among the latter were fifteen—or at least, so we thought—Krag-equipped Guardia, and a machine-gun! Needless to say, each of us was well aware of the futility of any further attempt to escape afoot. In the bush, we would have been hunted down like dogs.

Below us we could see the rioting natives swarming up the trail. I remember hearing the *rat-tat-tat* of the machine-gun and thinking how lucky we were that it was not closer. Suddenly forty or fifty horsemen dashed from the thicket headed straight for us, shouting and firing as they came. An immense cloud of dust arose. As they bore down upon us we began to fire, one by one, each picking a man. Then followed a period of choking dust, ringing ear-drums, acrid powder-smoke, sweat and firing—all merged into a oneness which was chaos. Where was the machine-gun? I could not hear it! Abruptly there was a dead calm.

Slowly the dust and smoke lifted. Within a hundred feet of our hut lay six motionless bodies. I was surprised to find that I had emptied two clips of shells. Surely it was not all over! I was glad for a short breathing-spell.

But it was to be more than that. Already the trail below was empty. Our late attackers, barring the six lying before us, had apparently vanished into thin air. Minutes passed; a half-hour, and then an hour. Not a soul in sight. Not one of us had been scratched.

"Well," said Hendricks, "let's beat it for the quartel."

We examined the bodies before we left the field. On one we found five drums of machine-gun ammunition.

"Wherein," remarked Hendricks, "lies the secret of our success—so far."

Arriving at the quartel without mishap, we found seven

badly scared Guardia. The poor devils swore by all their saints that they had not participated in the uprising; that they had been disarmed by the mutineers and their arms given to townspeople. They had been kept under guard. Hendricks told them to remain where they were until further orders.

We walked slowly toward our quarters. In doorways and windows women regarded us darkly and sullenly. There was not a man in sight. Nevertheless, I had an itchy feeling between my shoulder-blades, as I trudged up that dusty *calle*.

I asked Hendricks: "Do you think it is all over?"

"I believe it is, for the time being," he replied. "These gooks have been working themselves up for this ever since we have been here. Agitators, would-be *politicos*, have been fanning the embers, and the flame burst forth today. Well-timed, too, I must say!

"They are funny, these people," he went on. "The members of the Guardia themselves do not know for sure where they stand. The natives in this area are not in sympathy with the idea of a Guardia officered by Marines. Well, between the agitators and *guaro*—which, by the way, is a heady drink—enough hysteria was worked up to bring about this outburst. They will be over it now for a while. They have proved to themselves that they are *muy hombre*, brave enough to do and die. And, it is ten to one that more of them got to do that little thing today than the ones left in that field—die, I mean. And now to go and give what are left of my brave men particular hell!"

Hendricks went out. From somewhere down the street the tinny strains of a phonograph burst forth. He was right—it was over. The tenseness was broken. I realized then what I should have been aware of, before the outbreak. As I came up the street, I should have missed the usual bedlam of countless phonographs in action.

I was almost believing the events of the afternoon could not have happened when a somber-eyed woman came timidly to the door.

"*El señor doctor?*" she asked. And would I come *pronto* to see her husband who had been grievously hurt?

I had several such requests that evening, and I went each time. I needed no further reminder that the happenings of the afternoon had been no dream.

On Niagara's Brink

By Allen Martin

This is one of the most frightful situations imaginable.

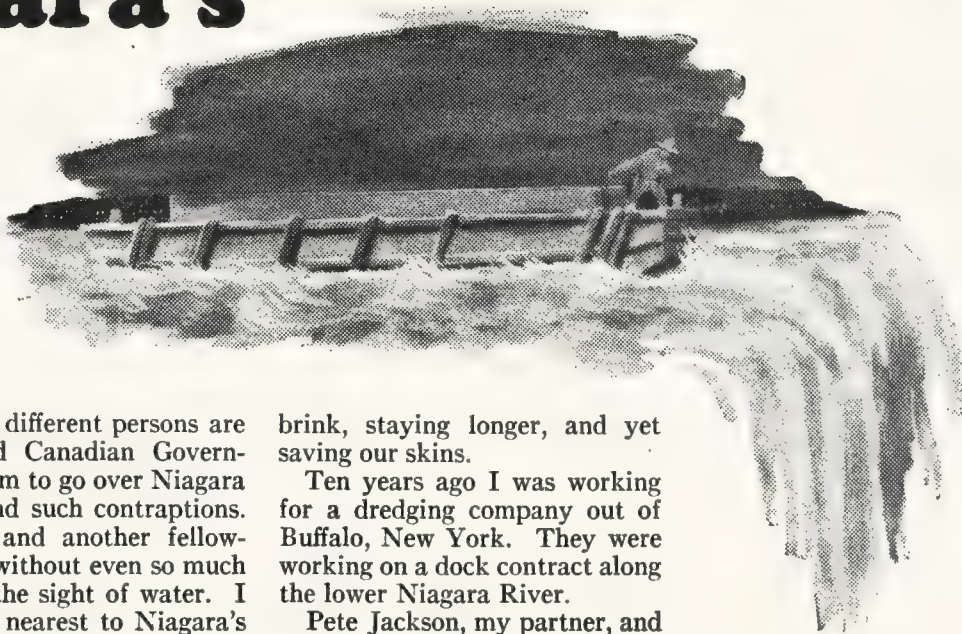
AT the present time, two or three different persons are requesting the American and Canadian Governments' permission to allow them to go over Niagara Falls in rubber balls, steel barrels and such contraptions.

Without any such permission, I and another fellow-worker came so near to going over,—without even so much as a rubber band,—that I still hate the sight of water. I believe we hold the record for going nearest to Niagara's

brink, staying longer, and yet saving our skins.

Ten years ago I was working for a dredging company out of Buffalo, New York. They were working on a dock contract along the lower Niagara River.

Pete Jackson, my partner, and



I were handling a big five-pocket mud scow. Our job was to keep the decks clean, handle the lines and, when the scow was towed out into Lake Erie, to dump the mud from its steel pockets.

On the day of our momentous adventure, the work went the same as ever, excepting that due to a late start we did not arrive back at the dock job until it was getting dark. The tug pushed our scow into the dock, and at once steamed off up the river. Pete was forward where he had been busy throwing off the tug's cross-hawsers. I had a date and was in a hurry, so I shouted at Pete to tie her up. At the same time Pete shouted back. I understood him to say he would take care of the lines, so I jumped ashore.

WHEN fifty feet up the dock, I looked back. The scow had no lines out and was floating free; only her stern was nosing the dock. Pete was nowhere in sight. Thinking he might have fallen overboard, I sprinted back and just managed to jump onto the stern. I called out Pete's name, and to my surprise, his head bobbed up out of the scuttle-hole in the bow.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Nothing happened; I was changing my shoes," he said. But after one look at the receding bank his face changed.

"Holy Mackerel! Didn't you tie her up?"

"No, I didn't tie her up. I thought you were going to!"

We stood arguing back and forth.

"Wait a minute," I finally shouted. "What are we going to do about this? I've got a date."

Pete grinned. "So has the scow, the way she's hurrying."

But his grin soon faded. "Say," he remarked, "if we keep on going, we're going straight over the Falls."

"We won't go straight over," I said. "We'll have to turn the corner when we get there. But you never went straight anywhere in your whole life."

All this time the scow, having no load of mud to weigh her down, was traveling rapidly. She would keep to a straight course; then a cross-current catching her would spin her like a heavy-footed toe-dancer.

The last few streamers of the sinking sun wavered above the tree-tops along the Canadian shore. With a few dying flickers to mark its going, it blinked out, leaving us in almost complete darkness. To judge from the lights along the shore, we were now out in the middle of the river, and going strong.

Since we had had no night tows in the last five months, the scow did not have any lantern or light aboard.

Not being able to do anything, we sat down and watched the water, assuring ourselves that the tug *International* would catch us before we reached the Falls, as she had caught everything else that had been anywhere near going over.

After an eternity of swirling, running now stern and now bow first, the scow started to buck up and down. We both jumped to our feet. We had reached the first fast water above the Falls, although as yet we could not hear their roar.

To the tug *International*, our last hope, we must have looked like a shadowy block on the fast-moving water, for we had now passed their station.

As we got into the first rapids, the scow acted like a bucking broncho. Our calmness was entirely gone; the two of us were like madmen.

What to do? The scow, not being loaded, was so light in draft that what rocks we failed to miss, we would scrape over. The roar of the rapids overlay in our ears the heavier thundering that was now but three-quarters of a mile ahead. We were drenched from the flying spray that swept the deck.

About this time some one on the Canadian shore saw us.

Automobile horns started to squall, and as if by magic, hundreds of headlights were turned to shine out over the river. We were giving Niagara's tourists an added thrill.

As the horns began blowing, I had an idea.

"Pete!" I screamed in his ear. "The pockets! Let down the pockets!"

The mud pockets when empty are pawled up on chains and secured by dogs, or what is commonly known as ratchet fingers. To drop a pocket, all we need do was to knock loose the steel dog and let the chains run free.

As soon as I yelled in Pete's ear, we both jumped up. At the same moment, the scow took an eight-foot leap—we had gone over a small falls in the rapids. Although we were both still clinging to the towing bits, Pete was slammed down against the steel deck, breaking his ankle.

After the plunge, the scow swerved on. I grabbed a small bar and knocked the first ratchet loose. As the chains stopped roaring, the open mouth of the pocket bit into rock. For the moment we were anchored.

But what an anchorage—the lower rapids tearing by our sides, the echo of the Horseshoe Falls below, and the wet steel deck canted at a forty-five-degree angle!

Pete was now moaning from the pain of his broken ankle. Tugging him up the slippery, inclined deck, I lowered him through the scuttle-hole, where we had nailed some planks across the beams. Laying Pete on this rude platform, I put my extra coat under his head, then climbed out on deck to see if the scow was still wedged tight. At the time of the last plunge, the scow had swerved over toward the Canadian shore.

The parkway along the river bank was now black with people. It seemed I had been sitting on deck for an hour, when a commotion occurred in the crowd. A life-saving gun was brought to the edge of the rapids. Five or six attempts were made to shoot a line out, but they all fell short by fifty yards. After the sixth try they quit. I went back down to Pete, who still lay moaning, and sat there with him, listening to the roar of the Falls, waiting hopelessly for whatever might happen.

AFTER another hour or two, the automobile-horns all came to life together. Once more I climbed on deck. A gun had been set up again. The line shot out—it swirled straight over the deck. I fell across it in a desperate dive, and madly began to overhaul it. I came to a knot and a heavier rope. The next knot brought a still heavier rope than its mate.

I was now all in. Have you ever pulled a rope through water? Try pulling a good long one through boiling rapids!

I secured the rope and went below for Pete. After easing him on deck, I followed. I explained it to him. We would both have to pull on this last line or we would never get off. So Pete, despite his broken ankle, pulled hand-over-hand, hand-over-hand until we had her. We crawled up the deck, and fastened it around the towing bits.

In about five minutes a breeches-buoy came sliding out to us.

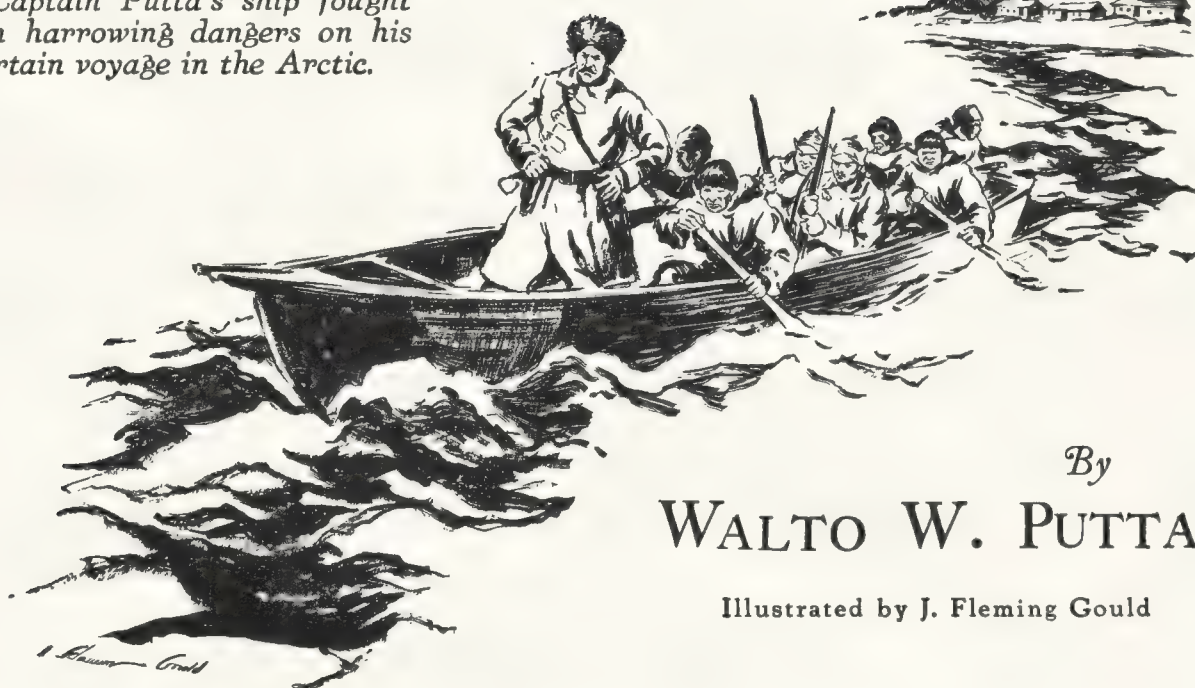
Pete went first. From where I stood he looked like a popcorn ball, bobbing up and down in the spray, while they pulled him slowly ashore. I took the next ride.

When we were both ashore, we found the life-saving crew had come from St. Catherine's, located on Lake Ontario. The first gun the local people had was not powerful enough, so they had called up St. Catherine's.

If you visit the Falls, you can still see the bones of the old scow sticking out of the rapids.

After our rescue Pete went to the hospital; I went home. To this day, we wouldn't go near Niagara Falls, even for a honeymoon!

Battling ice-floes, bergs, and Russian Reds, Captain Putta's ship fought through harrowing dangers on his uncertain voyage in the Arctic.



By
WALTO W. PUTTA

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

Pirates of the Frozen Seas

A LOVE of adventure is deeply rooted in the nature of most human beings—a survival of those early race-experiences which made life itself the price of failure to act with power in a crisis. With the development of civilization, the types of danger vary, with a consequent demand for change in the methods of meeting them; but the essential elements do not change, and sailors on salt water, particularly in small vessels, have as primitive conditions to cope with in the Twentieth Century as did those men who went down to the sea in the ships of Phœnicia.

This story of the trading-schooner *Iskum*, and her adventurous trip to Arctic Siberia under my guidance in the summer of 1923, is a story of elemental dangers met with at the hands of both Nature and man, involving a too-early penetration into the breaking ice of the Arctic, and an equally dangerous entanglement with the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, with threats of a complication of trade relations between the British and the American Governments. It reveals a quality of pluck and poise on the part of the schooner's entire personnel, except for which none of us would have returned to relate our adventures. More than that: it illuminates a profound human truth, which was as universal in the days of the Vikings as it is in the day of transatlantic flyers, namely, that when a man finds himself forced to the extreme limit of human ingenuity and power, with defeat facing him and those dependent on his leadership, his very desperation often drives him into the performance of some act which can apparently be nothing but futile, but which eventually proves the turning-point toward deliverance.

I did not want to write this story, for I felt myself inadequate to it. I wanted it written, however, and put it up forcefully to my friend A. N. ("Jumbo") Thomas,

who had shipped with me as chief engineer on that unforgettable voyage. Thomas, with fire and imagination in his make-up, and a wealth of harmless profanity on his tongue, recalled so many picturesque incidents of our mutual adventure when we happened to meet some years later in Southern California, that he soon had me asking repeatedly:

"Why don't you write a story about it? Why don't you, now?"

"Why the hell don't *you* do it?" came his invariable rejoinder.

And so I did.

In order to give the reader a true perspective on the conditions into which our journey carried us, it is necessary that certain details of a previous trip to the Arctic on the same schooner be sketched in as background, together with an outline of my personal preparation for the responsibilities I assumed as master of the *Iskum*.

A Finlander by birth—although an American citizen since 1917—I had followed the sea from my boyhood, on square-riggers, schooners, freighters, and passenger-ships, in time filling every position from deck-boy to captain, until in 1922 I held a long-coveted berth as master of the United States Shipping Board steamer *West Jester*.

Then, in February of the same year, through the bankruptcy of the operating company, and the consequent laying up of the *West Jester* at Seattle, I was forced to hunt another position. To my considerable dejection, I was offered the mere possibility of a third mate's berth on one of another company's steamers—a disheartening descent from my recent mastership, and the first official drop I had been forced to consider during my whole seventeen years of seafaring. Before committing myself to this contract, however, I received an offer from the

Phoenix Northern Trading Company to become chief officer on their schooner *Iskum*.

WITH this offer I smelled the wind of adventure, the thing which had first sent me to sea. The novelty of merely moving from ship to ship and from port to port in the ordinary routine of sea-life had long since worn off. A chain of sinister circumstances had even cheated me of my share in the World War, for when the United States went in, I was second officer on a five-masted motor-schooner bound from Seattle to South America and France. Our ship's engines broke down, and she was a slow sailer. We reached Philadelphia just three days after a German submarine had sunk twenty ships, but before I could get to France the war was over.

I had never been in the Arctic, however, and the nearest approach I had made to ice navigation was a few encounters with icebergs on the North Atlantic and in the neighborhood of Cape Horn. This post of chief officer and navigator on an Arctic trading-schooner promised much of novelty and zest. I signed up gladly.

Colonel J. M. Ashton, managing owner of the Phoenix Northern Trading Company, and a shrewd lawyer of national reputation, made the trip with the *Iskum* that summer of 1922, and wrote the story of it in his book, "Ice-Bound." I will not recount it here except at a few points which link up in a vital way with the voyage of the following year. We started out that first time with a large cargo of supplies for the Indians and Eskimos of the primitive villages we expected to touch along the coast, but we were under the handicap of no clearance papers to Siberia from the United States Customs Office at Tacoma on account of the changing political complexion of the Russian Government. The British had a trading agreement with the Soviet Government, but the United States had not even that, and our officials considered conditions too unsafe in Siberia to guarantee American citizens protection in case of trouble. We might go if we wanted to, they said, but it must be at our own risk.

Colonel Ashton made personal application to the *de facto* government of Russia for a trading-permit at Petropavlovsk, and secured it, but we discovered eventually that it was more a lure than a promise—a bit of Soviet diplomacy of which I was to learn more on my second voyage.

THE entire experience was an invaluable one for me, for I had to pit my wits and ability against the skill of grizzled old Arctic navigators in order to hold my own, and so became prepared for the far greater dangers of the second trip. We just escaped a major adventure, however, which would have made a great story. While within the Arctic Circle we came in sight of Rodger's Harbor, on Wrangel Island, three hundred sixty miles off East Cape on the Siberian mainland. Wrangel was supposed to be uninhabited, a mere rumor being afloat to the effect that some people were living there at that time. Rumors had been flying around us in clouds, however, relating to various matters, and as Colonel Ashton had become disgusted with trying to discover any truth at bottom, he ordered me to pass up Wrangel and make directly for Kolyma, on the mainland.

This was a tragic mistake, as we learned when we returned to Nome in the fall. Several survivors of the Stefansson Polar Expedition were then still alive on the island, waiting and hoping for rescue. Definite word had come through, and plans were then on foot for a rescue party to go out the following spring on the *Donaldson*, under Captain Hanson, navigator. As Colonel Ashton has stated in "Ice-Bound," we would most certainly have made the effort to bring off these brave survivors if we

had only known they were there when the *Iskum* sailed within twenty miles of them.

Upon our return to Tacoma that fall, Colonel Ashton retained me in the employ of the Phoenix Northern Trading Company, appointing me to the important and welcome task of altering the interior of the *Iskum*, building a pilot-house, adding rigging, and otherwise rendering the vessel more fit for the hazards of Arctic trade. I had come to be much attached to the little schooner, whose name—the Indian for "Goes there and back"—had proved an appropriate one so far. In consequence of this arrangement I lived on board that winter, having my wife and our little daughter Nonna with me.

During the process of refitting, I had a good deal of assistance from the yard of Martin Petrich, the Tacoma shipbuilder. It was in this connection that my important contact with "Jumbo" Thomas came about, as he was the owner of the machine-shop at the yard. He interested me from the outset. Stockily built, with a short, heavy neck, his whole body was as vibrant with energy as a dynamo. I came to the conclusion that the reason he is known as "Jumbo" from New York to Seattle, and from Indian Point to Cape San Lucas, is that he expresses his thoughts, and puts them into action, with the unflagging force of a pile-driver.

AS our acquaintance developed, Jumbo confided to me that the machine-shop was not bringing him enough of an income. He wanted to make real money, and make it fast, but had not yet determined what line to follow. I admitted, in the same confidential way, that I too felt drawn to the root of all evil, and recounted the years through which I had been steadily at work for wages ranging all the way from five dollars to three hundred a month, with very little now to show for any of it.

Together we began to consider the various money-making enterprises within our range of observation, coming to the conclusion that the fur-trading business offered the biggest chances of fortune. Soon we saw ourselves in a joint enterprise of this sort, amassing great wealth while at the same time enjoying countless adventures. Jumbo decided to leave his machine-shop in charge of others for the summer ahead, while he shipped with me on the *Iskum* for our Arctic voyage. We would learn the fur business together, and gain valuable experience in general, so that at the end of the trip we would be justified in raising the price of our services to a figure that would send Colonel Ashton looking for another captain and chief engineer. Securing the necessary capital, we would then fit out our own boat and launch a trading expedition of our own.

Jumbo's decision to join the *Iskum's* 1923 expedition proved a fortunate one for all the rest of us, as later events showed—though not the source of profit he himself had expected.

The alterations made in the schooner that spring resulted in much more livable conditions. From under the fore-castle head the galley and crew's quarters were moved aft under the poop deck. This left the former quarters of the crew a convenient place for the storing and display of merchandise we meant to sell to the natives.

Another great convenience instituted on Jumbo's advice, and with his volunteered assistance, was a control for an anchor windlass, rigged from the main engine to the fore-castle head. This harnessed the engine with the hoisting of the anchor, and made the frequent anchoring mere child's play as compared with the drudgery of handling the necessarily heavy weights without power, as we had done all the previous trip. The rigors of that chilly Arctic summer led me also to install better sanitary arrangements, lack of which had previously caused much discomfort.

A new pilot-house on the poop deck, with a room back of it containing the usual bunks, was built. The old pilot-house over the stern then became a housing-place for part of the ship's stores. The obvious advantage of the new pilot-house was that it gave the man at the wheel a view of the horizon ahead instead of astern, and so rendered an extra man on lookout unnecessary as long as we were running in clear water. This point was very important in working with a small crew, as it meant we would all get twice as much sleep as on the previous trip, when both the lookout and the helmsman had to be on deck at all times.

The *Iskum's* propelling power was a seventy-five-horsepower Fairbanks-Morse semi-Diesel engine, with a plentiful supply of fuel oil. We had sails for auxiliary power, but I made a change in these, altering the gaff mainsail into a mutton-leg shape, the loss of area being overbalanced by the ease of handling, another point to consider with a small crew.

In April I had the good fortune to be able to employ as mate Alex Nicholson, who had been with me the year before and proved a valuable man to take on any trip.

The ideal combination in a mate, of course, is that of navigator and practical sailor, but it is one not easily found, the expert navigator often lacking the practical and active qualities of the sailor, while the general run of sailors refuse to be bothered with the technicalities of navigation. I could manage the navigation myself on this trip, but I did need a good all-around sailor, which Alex certainly was, and I considered myself in luck to get him. With him to help me, I soon put the finishing touches on the *Iskum's* make-up—white paint on the hull, with varnish on the spars and railings. The bottom had already been cleaned and painted, while the iron-bark covering, three-quarters of an inch thick, for protection against ice, had been raised to about two feet above the waterline.

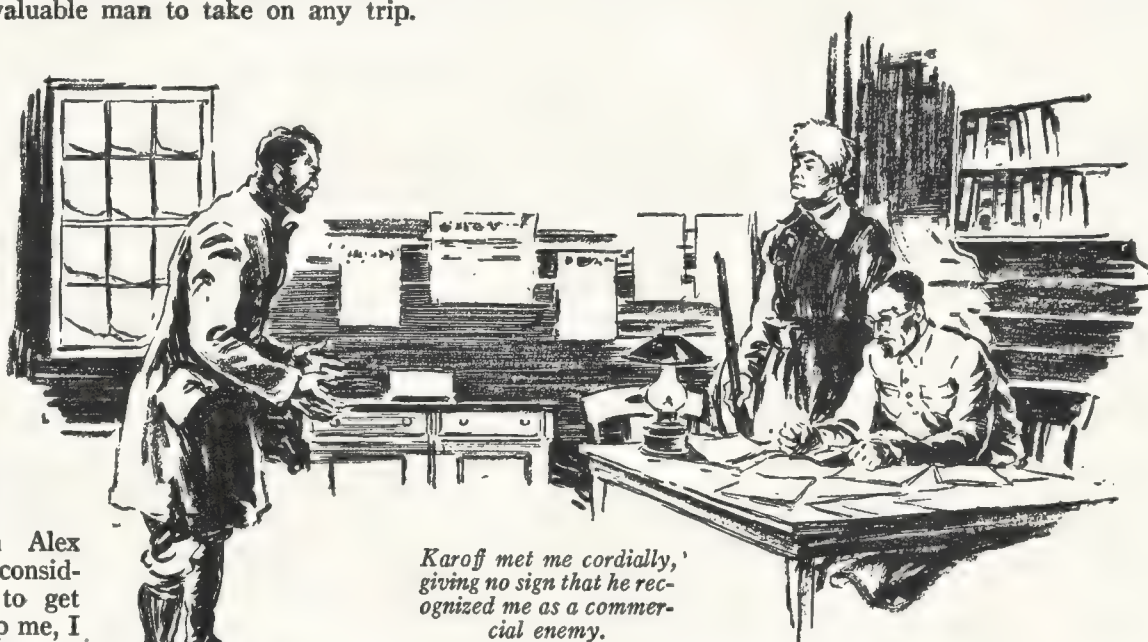
Another of my innovations, of which I was particularly proud, was a crow's-nest placed about fifty feet up the main mast. I had made this from a galvanized iron tube about twenty-four inches in diameter obtained from a piece of an old life-raft. When I was inside it, the thing stood almost to my eyes, so guaranteeing comparative protection against even the most cutting wind, while with speaking-tubes to both pilot-house and engine-room, and controls for engine bells, it let me communicate orders without climbing down. This would make navigation through ice a vastly easier matter than from the level of the deck, as the fifty-foot elevation gave a view far ahead, showing the leads through which we could pass, and at the same time made it possible to handle the ship directly for the avoidance of the ever-present icebergs and floes.

My winter and spring of planning, fitting, and readjusting brought about so marked an improvement in the *Iskum* that many who observed the eighty-nine-foot schooner at

the dock remarked that in both appearance and comfort it compared favorably with many a millionaire's yacht. I fairly chuckled with satisfaction over the results I had obtained.

Then a little incident occurred that reduced my ardor to a surprising degree. A fisherman pulled into the harbor one day, hauled his boat out on the beach, and began to work on her where I could scarcely help watching his progress. The boat was about thirty-five feet in length. He cut it in two, hauled the ends apart, and fitted in a section about three feet long, all within a space of four days. My interest being aroused, I asked him why he was doing all this. He answered that he had found the boat a little too short for comfort in the choppy waters off Cape Flattery, and had extended her to make her ride a bit more easily.

As we talked, I happened to glance up at the *Iskum's* main rigging, the two boats being close together, and spied the fisherman's seven-year-old boy in the act of climbing down the ropes. We both stood watching him, gasping



Karoff met me cordially, giving no sign that he recognized me as a commercial enemy.

for fear he would fall, as he let himself down from my crow's-nest and slid on toward the deck like a monkey. Seeing us, he shouted gleefully:

"Daddy, it was easy to get into that garbage-can—but it was hard to get out!"

A *garbage-can*—my crow's-nest I had worked so hard to rig up! Of course I took it as a joke at the time, but still the words were something of a shock.

Now I have never been accused of being superstitious. I took out my second mate's license on a Friday which was the thirteenth of the month, and my first mate's license on another thirteenth, with no mishaps following in either instance. But that careless speech from an innocent youngster began to haunt me like an omen, and later, during the weary weeks of our voyage which I spent on lookout, the words repeated themselves over and over, till I began to think perhaps the *Iskum* would suddenly be crushed and go down in the icy Arctic waters, with me caught inside the iron pipe of that same crow's-nest. The omen carried a certain amount of truth with it, though not foreshadowing exactly the kind of calamity which I imagined.

From time immemorial it has been the privilege of the master of a vessel to choose his own crew. On a trading-schooner of the *Iskum's* size other duties than those di-

rectly incident to the operation of the ship are necessarily laid upon the personnel, which complicates the matter of selection. Colonel Ashton told me that the secretary of the Phoenix Northern Trading Company, Mr. Ira Diem—who was going with us—would act as supercargo and sailor in addition to his secretarial duties, and would be prepared to render any other service I found necessary. The company's official trader, also, Mr. John Felkel, he said, was an experienced man in Siberian and Alaskan waters, capable of acting as mate. With Alex Nicholson already engaged as mate, however, we arranged for Felkel to serve as purser and sailor, and in case of emergency, as cook. The Colonel's nephew, Dave Tripple, shipped with us too—he was only fourteen years old, but was six feet tall, and he was keyed up with excitement over the chance to go adventuring among icebergs. Dave had no experience, of course, but he was eager to go, and was strong, willing, and capable.

AT this time a worthy man lately discharged from the State hospital for the insane came asking for the post of chief cook and steward. He was an accomplished conversationalist, and entertained me with fantastic stories of ancient cities in the Siberian wilderness, long lectures on ethnology, and related subjects. He assured me the Eskimo was a half-brother to the Arabian, and the *chuckchi*, or deer-man of Siberia, a Norwegian who had lingered so long in tropical regions he had acquired a dark skin, which would some day turn white again. Such evidence of exploring and investigating activities on the part of our prospective cook began to worry me. They made me wonder how many meals we would be due to miss while he was scientifically engaged.

After Colonel Ashton had duly looked into the case, however, he decided to engage some one else—a move which convinced me he was a good judge of human nature, worthy to be trusted in the selection of this last highly important member of the crew. That he had chosen me in the first place gave me the best possible opinion of his judgment, and as I had since seen a well-known Arctic navigator in the vicinity of his office, I determined to offer no suggestions of my own, for fear of jeopardizing the very definite personal purpose which led me to make this trip.

To my extreme satisfaction, all the men whom the Colonel selected proved, with minor exceptions, to be what he claimed for them. Our seventh addition was Jack Oliver, a handsome young U. S. Marine, with the restless blood of the adventurer in his veins balanced by plenty of experience. He became our steward and cook.

JUST before we were to leave the home shore, Captain Coffin, a veteran navigator of Puget Sound waters, brought a letter which he wanted us to deliver to his son in the Far North. The younger Coffin had gone out as a member of the Miss Kelley Expedition, a group of half a dozen Canadian and American men of fine pioneer quality led by the woman who had conceived the idea of the project three years before. Their purpose had been to build a sawmill up the course of the Anadir River in Siberia—the town of Anadir (little but a trading-post used by the Hudson Bay and the Olaf Svensen companies), located at the mouth of the river, not far below the Arctic Circle, being their base of supplies. I did not accept the letter, as our itinerary as then made out was not taking us to Anadir. A strange alteration in our plans later took us to that very spot, however, giving young Coffin a chance to show himself our very good friend when we needed friends badly.

No prospect of unusual danger cast a shadow on our

leave-taking, although the Customs Office again refused us clearance papers. The United States Government had steadily declined to recognize the Russian Soviet Government, which meant no official protection for American citizens venturing into Russian territory. We had been promised a trading-permit again, however, such as Colonel Ashton had obtained the year before, and with the experience of the previous voyage to keep us on our guard, we felt sure of being able to take care of ourselves. We knew the natives of those cold, inhospitable regions were only too glad of a chance to barter what they had for the bright and attractive, although cheap, articles we had laid in stock for them. Most of our calicoes, denims, and gingham for clothing were of high-colored patterns, for we had discovered the native women to be quite skillful in decorative design, making themselves picturesque with really artistic combinations in the way of trimmings and bindings. The other principal commodities we were carrying were flour, tea, sugar, tobacco, cooking-utensils, tools, tents, and ready-to-wear clothing. Deep in my heart I held the hope that some of these commodities might be placed in the hands of those men on Wrangel Island, all that were left of the gallant Stefansson party, who were patiently waiting for some one from home to come and bring them back to their own world. What a triumph it would be for the trader *Iskum* if her commercial voyage might bear a share in that larger, heroic expedition! We could at least look toward it as a possibility.

In the course of a seafaring career, few men, I venture to say, can recall many voyages as always pleasant or amusing—something to bring them a sense of satisfaction and cheer. Most unusual is a voyage unmarred by jealousies or ill-feeling among the ship's complement, when all are pulling together for the success of the trip, each showing fine consideration for the feelings and well-being of his mates. Such a voyage, however, this one of the *Iskum's* was destined to be, and in the face of physical discomforts, mental suffering, and uncertainties of life and death which we met together, it still stands out to all of us as one of the red-letter experiences of our lives.

CHAPTER II

IT was the twelfth of May, 1923, when our relatives and friends gave us a rousing send-off at the city dock in Tacoma. They in turn were cheered by the picturesque articles which appeared in the newspapers about our voyage. The following are samples of the write-ups the reporters turned in:

ROMANCE SAILS WITH SCHOONER

ISKUM CHUGS OUT OF HARBOR ON RESCUE MISSION AND TRADING CRUISE

Bound for a five-months' cruise among the Eskimos and ice-floes of Arctic seas, during which an attempt will be made to rescue four members of the Stefansson polar expedition of 1915 who have been marooned on Wrangel Island since 1921, the auxiliary schooner *Iskum*, of the Phoenix-Northern Trading Company, quietly slipped out of Tacoma harbor at two o'clock yesterday afternoon.

The casual observer might have taken her to be an unimportant fishing boat, as she demurely chugged down the city waterway. But on the success of the *Iskum's* trip depend the lives of four men, and an investment of many thousands of dollars by the company that owns her.

There were men typical of those "who go down to the sea in ships" aboard the *Iskum*. And as the strip of water between the little boat and the cluster on the dock widened, one got a tang of the romance that must have accompanied the departure of the storied New Bedford whalers.

Families of the men who composed the crew were in the group on shore, with Col. James Ashton, president of the Trading Company, Mrs. Ashton, a few friends, and newspapermen.

Of those who were on the dock as the boat's engines started turning were Mrs. Putta, 4519 Eleventh Avenue, Northeast, Seattle, and her ten-year-old daughter Nonna; Mrs. Ira Diem, wife of the supercargo, and their eight-year-old son, of 6038 Fifth Avenue Northwest.

Gone Five Months at Least

The boat and its crew will be gone five months at least in regions that for civilization are like the Northwest was a hundred years ago. Many ships have gone there and never returned; many have gone for months and stayed for years, caught in the ice.

The *Iskum* will take A. N. ("Jumbo") Thomas, engineer, well known to Tacoma mariners, the farthest north he has ever been. John Felkel, learned in the linguistic acrobatics of the Eskimo, will be principal buyer of the expedition. He professes to belong to that race known over the world as barterers and traders.

"You've got to handle Eskimos carefully and let them take their time about trading," he said. "They know you want their furs, and they're out to get everything they can for them. So many traders go North that they are pretty wise. If you try to rush them they may close up entirely."

Captain Is Veteran

Capt. W. W. Putta is a veteran of many trips to the Far North. Just before his boat sailed he was confident they would be able to reach the four marooned men on Wrangel Island.

"I think they're still there and alive," he said, "unless they've got off across the ice. I don't think that likely, because it's risky, and I don't think they had dogs."

"We will be able to get to the island this year, because the ice is breaking up, I have heard from the North. The company has eighty dogs and sleds at trading stations in the North, and if need be we can go overland after the men."

The hold of the *Iskum* carries everything from guns and ammunition to mosquito-netting, knives, boat fixtures, clothes and canned goods for barter with the natives, besides provisions for her crew.

We made rather an unusual appearance, because of the various types of merchandise loaded on the decks to be left at places passed on the out-voyage. One conspicuous object was a knocked-down house we were taking to a Mr. Johnson and his family who kept the trading-post at Kalyutchin Bay on the north shore of Siberia within the Arctic Circle. Coal, kerosene, and gasoline cases, and oil drums also helped to give us peculiar and bulky outlines. But we moved smoothly until the second day out, when undue rumblings in the clutch induced us to pull into Vancouver, where the Fairbanks-Morse man, Mr. Parson, came aboard for investigation of our mechanical equipment.

At the dock our grotesque-looking cargo collected quite a crowd of curious observers. They gazed at us silently until one jolly white-haired Britisher broke out with a question to our steward Jack Oliver, conveniently near the dock-side.

"I say, old man," he shouted, "where is this craft going?"

"Siberia!" shouted Jack in reply.

"Siberia! Fawncy, Siberia!" came the old man's wondering comment.

The Fairbanks-Morse man continued with us for observa-

tion and work on the engine, and we plodded uneventfully through the Georgia Straits. Mr. Diem, our secretary and supercargo, was at the wheel, but I relieved him to steer through the Seymour Narrows. Diem, instead of announcing the course formally and distinctly, according to regulation, staged a bit of comedy as I relieved him, by repeating with a perfect British accent:

"Siberia! Fawncy, Siberia!"

It was amusing, but it showed me I would have to begin at once to teach this landlubber the *a-b-c's* of ship-discipline. I informed him that while I was perfectly aware our course lay through the Narrows, he was none the less under obligation to announce the course clearly, and that I would permit no foolery about the running of the *Iskum*.

"Just such nonsense as that," I said, "might result in wrecking the ship, or in sending us wandering off into the ocean. After we pass out of Dixon Entrance to the Gulf of Alaska, you may not find yourself feeling so gay. You will be more apt then to understand why a seafaring man takes his courses seriously."

Many readers are aware that the six hundred fifty miles of inside passage leading from Seattle to Ketchikan, opposite Dixon Entrance, are narrow and intricate. I had to snatch such sleep as I was obliged to have, between the changes of course, and at such times I gave the man at the wheel orders to call me at intervals which ranged from fifteen minutes to two hours, according to our location. Our combination purser, sailor, and trader, Mr. Felkel, who had also felt competent for the mate's job, claimed to know the Siberian waters, but refused to take responsibility in the British Columbian and the Alaskan passages. This made my work arduous during the early stages of the voyage, as Nicholson was unprepared to relieve me either. Later, however, when we reached open waters, a change of course once a day would suffice, and I could then make up for lost sleep.

Our successful avoidance of all the rocks and reefs through the British Columbia waters reminds me of a conversation I once overheard between a well-known Alaskan navigator and one of his lady passengers.

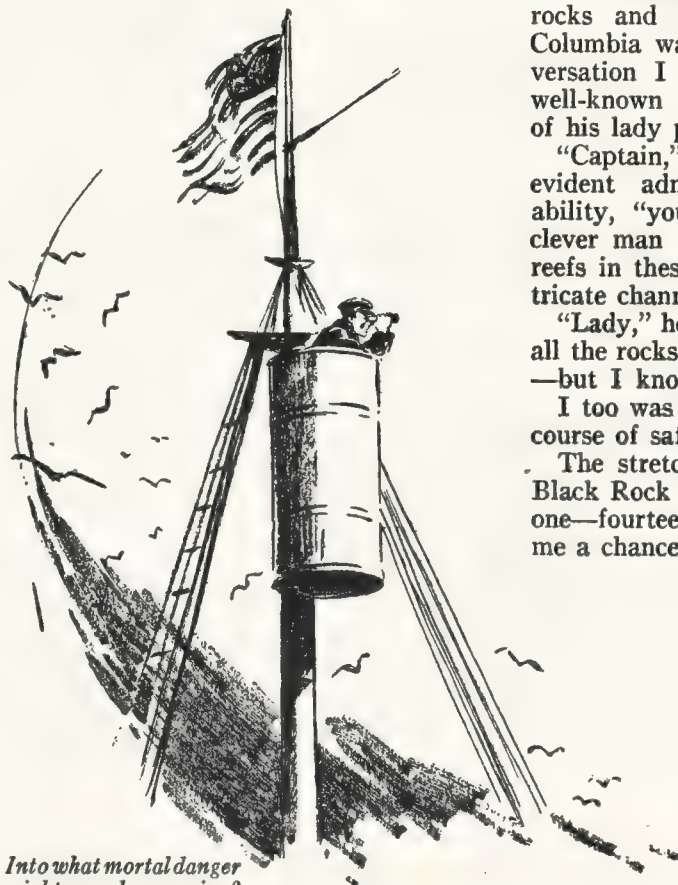
"Captain," said the lady seriously, in evident admiration of the skipper's ability, "you must be an exceedingly clever man to know all the rocks and reefs in these thousands of miles of intricate channels."

"Lady," he answered, "I do not know all the rocks and reefs in these channels—but I know where they are not!"

I too was keeping to the well-charted course of safety.

The stretch between Tree Point and Black Rock being an exceptionally long one—fourteen miles, to be exact—it gave me a chance to turn in for an hour and a half at a stretch. It was one-thirty in the morning when I gave the wheel to Felkel. I instructed him to call me at three, and make sure he got me up.

Felkel, of medium height, dark, and quick of movement, like most men of his Semitic strain, was also as given to argument.



Into what mortal danger might we be moving?

He was strong for my taking a longer sleep, and said so urgently.

"You will make no mistake in leaving everything to me now," he assured me. "Every foot we move is bringing me nearer to my happy hunting-ground of the North, where I am familiar with all conditions. Take a good nap, and let me show you."

I was immovable on the point of being called at three, however, and he finally agreed to my orders. But he did not call me. In response to the magic inner voice of my own consciousness, I wakened suddenly, to find it three-thirty. I sprang from my bunk, wondering what had happened to prevent my orders from being obeyed. I looked out ahead to get our bearings, and found a high black rock looming directly in the *Iskum's* path, with Felkel nonchalantly steering straight for it.

Our purser-trader got the shock of his life as I reached the wheel almost at a single leap, caught it from his hands, and threw the helm hard to starboard.

THE *Iskum's* keel grazed the rock, although to my intense relief she slid quietly over. Felkel realized then what a close call he had given us, but he said nothing. Neither did I, until my inner rage had cooled down a bit. Then I made the pointed suggestion that he take up the occupation at which he had boasted he was an expert—that of cook.

"Jack Oliver will stand the watch at the wheel," I said. Meekly enough he took his medicine.

"My eyes are not so very good," he explained.

He took occasion at the breakfast-table to tell Oliver of the proposed shift of duties. "I'm going to run the galley for you, Jack," he announced generously.

"Fine!" responded Oliver when he grasped the situation; he was only too glad to be slated for work in his natural element, the open air.

"Yes, you can leave the cooking to me from now on. Have you plenty of paprika in your stores?"

"Paprika? Why, no, I don't believe I have any at all."

"No paprika? I told you over and over to put it on your list. How can you expect me to cook with no paprika?"

And the result was that each man kept his original job!

This experience was useful to me, for it taught me how wide a gap stretches between what many landlubbers think they can do on a boat, and what they actually can do, when it comes to a showdown.

We reached Ketchikan without further incident—the point at which we were to turn from the inshore course out toward open water. As our clutch and engine were now functioning with smoothness, our Fairbanks-Morse mechanic went ashore when we put in for our final orders and to have our batteries overhauled. While in Ketchikan we learned that our competitor in trade, the *Chukotsk*, of the Olaf Svensen Company, had already left for northern waters, and was now in King's Bay near Unimak Pass—the gateway into the Bering Sea—and nine hundred miles ahead of us, but laid up with engine trouble of her own.

The importance of being first in those Arctic ports can scarcely be overstated. The natives will trade for the sheer joy of seeing a boat and some white men, and of getting something to eat to break the monotony of walrus meat and seal blubber. The first boat gets the cream of the business. From my previous year's experience, I knew that Harry Weeding, the master of the *Chukotsk*, was also my master when it came to navigation in ice-filled waters. With his boat getting an earlier start than the *Iskum*, I began to live with one thought uppermost in my mind—to beat him to it.

Leaving Ketchikan, we nosed into Dixon Entrance, the passage between Prince of Wales and Graham Islands which leads into the Gulf of Alaska. Upon emerging at the western end, I set the *Iskum* on the great circle-course for the nine hundred miles to Simeonof Island, of the Shumagin group, just east of the Alaska Peninsula. Then I let out a sigh of relief and went to my bunk. The weather was clear, with enough light northeasterly wind to steady the boat on her sails as she chugged along at about eight miles an hour. Sleep? Boy, I could sleep!

I came to the surface the next morning long enough to take a longitude sight, and found Diem at the wheel grinning from ear to ear at sight of me. It was his habit to grin like that, no matter how crabby one might be from broken rest. He made me smile now.

"Siberia! Fawncy, Siberia!" he chuckled.

This was his way of challenging me to bring on the rough weather I had warned him would meet us in the Gulf of Alaska. But I enjoyed fine days as much as he, and felt it would be poor business to pray for high winds and heavy seas just for the sake of clinching an argument.

Dave Tripple, our youthful first assistant engineer, had been full of pep and joy up to this point, his cheeks glowing with color, his little blue knitted skating-cap with the pompom on top pulled cockily over his crisp brown hair. But out here in the open waters he began to feel very seasick. He lost his color, and his eyes looked rather hollow, but after each upheaval he doggedly returned to his engine, showing that he had the right kind of grit. I felt sorry for him, for I had started to sea at just about his age, and remembered keenly the fun the older men made of my sufferings. We were more considerate of Dave, though I was glad to see he was bent on keeping his troubles to himself. Fortunately, his attack did not last long, while later on his courage had a chance to prove itself in other ways. Diem was the one I had expected would fall victim to seasickness, but he surprised me by continuing to eat as heartily as ever.

CHAPTER III

NOTHING unusual happened on the nine-hundred-mile stretch to Shumagin Islands; the weather remained favorable, with everybody aboard cheerfully fulfilling his duty. As a consequence, I indulged in plenty of sleep. Relaxation, in my opinion, is the mother of endurance. Anticipating long hours later on, and work which required instantaneous alertness and accurate judgment, I relaxed, becoming dead to the world, except for the taking of necessary observations and my three meals a day. The frolickings of my shipmates did not distract me, but merely broke the monotony.

Five days at sea brought the outlines of the Shumagin Islands looming large before us—a welcome sight. Fog hid from our view the many volcanoes which would otherwise have been visible on the Alaska Peninsula. As we passed Scotch Cap, through Unimak Pass toward the Bering Sea, formidable black clouds massed themselves along the sky as if to warn us against entering. A few miles inside the passage, we stopped at Slime Bank to fish for cod. Each man on the boat was provided with a fishing line thirty-five fathoms long, equipped with large hook sinker and bait. We let the hooks down into thirty-two fathoms of water, and the sinkers had no more than touched bottom when every hook got a bite. The whole crew began pulling up fish. The sinkers were heavy, so that it was hard work to pull them up again with the addition of fish weighing from ten to thirty pounds on the line—but we had a dozen kegs we wanted to fill for the white

trade in Siberia, and for food for ourselves, and we kept at it, working fast.

Felkel hauled one fish to the surface and began leading it fore and aft on his line until he made me nervous.

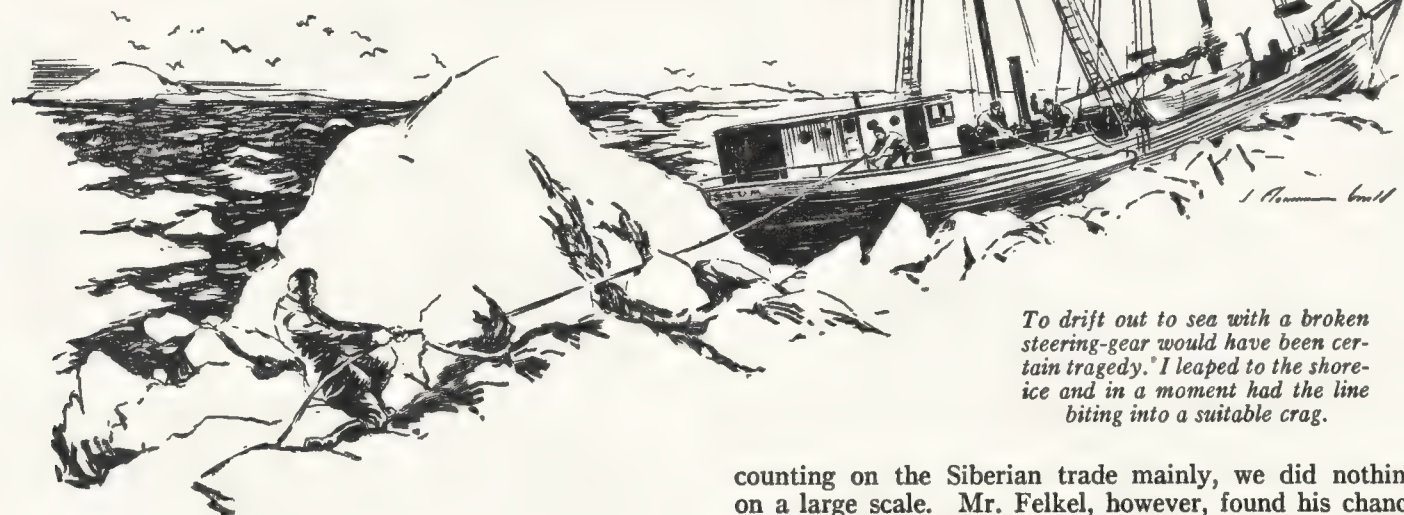
"Get that fish up!" I shouted at last. "What are you waiting for, Mr. Felkel?"

"I got to play dem," he protested earnestly. "I got to play dem."

It was to laugh. When a codfish is brought up from a thirty-fathom depth, the difference in water-pressure between the bottom and the surface alone almost kills it. This one Felkel wanted to play was on its back on top of the water with its mouth open.

Alex Nicholson relieved me of the unwelcome duty of delivering another lecture to our versatile trader.

"You just pull that fish up," he advised Felkel, "and play your line out. Then play it up again, and, if you haven't a gamier fish on it that time, pull it on board and play for another."



To drift out to sea with a broken steering-gear would have been certain tragedy. I leaped to the shore-ice and in a moment had the line biting into a suitable crag.

Within two hours we had sixty fat codfish on the decks.

I shaped our course toward West Cape, St. Lawrence Island, six hundred miles northwest toward the Siberian coast. The sky warmed up to us, dismissing all threat of opposition, leaving the air moderate and the sea smooth. Two goonies—a bird on the order of the albatross, though brown in color—circled the ship, landing on the water to pick up refuse thrown overboard—a good-luck sign for us, as sailors reckon.

Our third day out in the Bering Sea brought the glint of ice ahead—the reflection on the sky of distant ice. The air, too, came cool in our nostrils, with a warning chill. Everybody looked up and ahead, glancing at me for my comments on this early appearance of our great enemy. I said nothing. It was of no use for me to climb to the crow's-nest yet, as the leads cannot be seen until one's ship is close to the ice-field. When the time came for action I went up, stopped the ship, and took observations with glasses in all directions. I found an ice-field which extended farther than I could see. I was confronted with the problem, usual in the Arctic and the Bering Seas, of navigating around the ice, with nothing but personal judgment as a guide.

I chanced it to the eastward, against the wind.

Twenty-four hours of zigzagging among ice-floes brought to view the objective previously set—West Cape, St. Lawrence Island. Arriving without incident, we stopped at Puguiliak Village, but found nothing there but an empty

hunting cabin, the population evidently having moved. We then proceeded to Gambell Village, on Cape Chibukak, the northwestern extremity of the Island.

The natives here proved ready to trade, but as we were

counting on the Siberian trade mainly, we did nothing on a large scale. Mr. Felkel, however, found his chance to prove his proficiency in one thing, at least. He certainly knew furs. He could pick one up, shake it, hold it by both ends, give it a flip, look at the hair from the side, and immediately place it in one of the five different recognized classes. Upon his advice, I bought two excellent white fox skins—just what my wife had been desiring for years.

The natives of St. Lawrence Island, which is on the American side of the international line through the Bering Strait, made a great impression on us, with their good houses, boats, clothing, and ivory ornaments decorated with engraving and painting. The contrast their prosperity presented to the poverty and misery of the natives of Northeast Siberia whom we met later furnished us much food for thought.

The *Iskum* nosed her way on toward the mainland, until, on June fourth, she reached Cape Chaplin, Siberia, more commonly known as Indian Point, because of a village of about three hundred Eskimos located there which also at times numbers a few white Russian inhabitants.

As we cast anchor, I felt a distinct surprise over the lack of activity on shore. The year before, the natives had poured out to meet us and direct us to safe anchorage, after which they crowded the decks until even standing-room was at a premium. We were to experience a very different welcome this time. When about to launch a boat and go ashore, we saw an old whaleboat approaching, paddled by natives and carrying three armed white men. The white men boarded the *Iskum*, the leader wearing

two automatic revolvers strapped under his coat, the two guards each equipped with a rifle.

I recognized the leader at once as a man named Burgh whom I had met the year before in Kakum Village, Mechigme Bay. Something about him had at once caught my attention. Of medium build, measuring about five feet nine inches in height, he had light brown hair, blue eyes, a slightly Roman nose, and lips which seemed to turn into a smile from force of habit. He had proved very interesting upon acquaintance then, giving me bits of information, in his bookish English, regarding the natives of the coast. Vividly he described to me their manner of getting their whale with a large skin boat, and of splitting hides of walrus. He said he had become accustomed to living on walrus meat and seal blubber. Another conversation brought forth a discussion on the habits of white foxes and the methods used in catching them. In fact, he was an exceptionally interesting man, and as he was not a trader, I found myself wondering how he came to be living in that remote spot. I suspected he was some sort of official agent, or spy.

He now introduced himself in a formal tone and manner, as the local representative of the Russian Soviet Government, and in that capacity proceeded to ask me for the ship's papers, Russian consular clearance from Tacoma and other documents we did not have.

"There is no regular Russian consul in Tacoma," I informed him, "and the United States Customs House officials would not clear us for Siberia. As the same conditions prevailed last year, we looked for no trouble this time. Our company has trading-posts, property, and employees in Siberia. We have always been on friendly terms with both the Russians and the natives. We came at our own risk, because we had confidence the Russian Government-in-power would give us a fair deal such as we have always had before. What's more, Colonel Ashton secured a trading-permit from Petropavlovsk, and I believe that is sufficient."

Petropavlovsk, a town on the Kamchatka Peninsula, was about twelve hundred miles from our present location.

Burgh did not agree with my conclusions. He insisted that he was acting under strict orders, and that we could do no trading until after we had secured another permit, which we might obtain at East Cape, a hundred forty miles north, although we might have to go to Anadir for it, a good four hundred miles through broken ice in the other direction. He said we were the first boat as yet to put in an appearance, and that the post there would buy a few things of us for their own use, though that would be the extent of our local trade. He assured us, however, that we would have no further trouble after once presenting our permit.

It was a most baffling situation. Here we were, first in the field, ready to sell, as the natives were no doubt ready to buy, and yet held up by three men, Burgh and his two guards, who claimed control of the coast in the name of a government unable to gain recognition from the most powerful government in the world, whose citizens we were!

WE thought over our predicament. Anadir, though much farther away from us than East Cape, was in virtually the same latitude. The town is not accessible until the first part of July, the ice even in the river holding until that time, a condition which leads traders to make their regular stops only on their return from the Arctic. If we must go somewhere to get a permit, I naturally chose East Cape. We could then continue on to the Arctic, and stop at both Indian Point and Anadir on our way back.

We announced that we would head for East Cape; Mr. Burgh at once said he would accompany us, his plans being made for traveling in that direction anyway. We took no exception to this as it is a matter of courtesy in these waters to give a lift to a traveler, particularly an official.

He continued to wear his two guns in our company, which surprised us a little, although we decided he must have acquired the habit since times became hazardous throughout the land of the former Czar.

Headway northward proved very difficult, the ice toward East Cape being, in parts, still in close pack. We covered the distance within two days, on June sixth mooring to the shore ice, which reached about six miles from the beach of East Cape.

Burgh and I decided to walk from here to the village of Dezhneva, in the bay just south of the Cape. The going proved to be bad over the rough, snow-covered ice. Although the snow was at times hard enough to bear our weight, we would often fall into crevices up to our necks, so that our whole progress was a matter of continual falling in and climbing out.

AHEAD we discerned a dog-team scrambling laboriously toward us, driven by a native whose commands, hurled at the dogs from his position at the back of the sled, came reverberating to us through the cool clear air from the cliffs of East Cape. Now the dogs would appear on the edge of a canted ice-floe, and as the leather straps tightened between them and their burden, some would leap, while others would roll down the slanting surface, bringing the sled into view at the top of the floe, with the native steering skillfully to keep it upright. Then all would disappear completely. A moment later the ears of the dogs would show up again, alert points against our line of vision, and in another instant we would see them repeat their tumbling act.

Burgh, who was some distance ahead, met the team first and directed it toward me. The native halted his dogs when quite near me and extended his hand in greeting. He told me he had sailed on American whalers, had been in San Francisco, and liked Americans. He then handed me the following note:

To Schooner *Iskum*:

I have enjoyed the hospitality of this native, Sunny Boy, and his son. He will keep all furs to trade to schooner next year. Treat him right.

W. H. PARSONS.

Parsons was the Phoenix Northern Trading Company's trader at Seniavine, about fifty miles north of Indian Point, and had evidently been here during the previous winter.

Sunny Boy was a full-blood Eskimo, large for a native, solid and husky—as perfect a physical adaptation to environment as I have seen in all Siberia. He loved to display his English vocabulary, but as it was made up almost wholly of profanity, the effect was always funny and sometimes amazing. He invited me to ride the rest of the way to the village, and I was not slow in accepting. We covered the distance in only a few minutes, as the well-trained dogs persistently held to their busy shuffle over the rough, hummocky ice. But of all the rides I have ever had this stands out as the roughest, bar none. I hung onto the sled for dear life but at that was forced to let go when it turned clean over as it did at times. Sunny Boy then stopped the dogs and waited until I could clamber aboard again.

Coming into the village of Dezhneva, we were met by two armed men, who directed me to go to the house of the resident official, a dwelling of ordinary sod outside, but boarded-over walls and roof inside, with sand poured between sod and boarding to keep in check the biting, deadly chill of the colder months. The *natchalnik*, I found, was a man named Karoff, whom I had met on my former trip. He was a Russian engaged in trading, as we were.

The year before he had employed a clever ruse to let his chartered schooner make the Arctic coast ahead of us, by sending us back to South Head, ninety miles away, on the

pretext that he wanted us to benefit by valuable trade and freight opportunities there. Although the trip was a wild-goose chase as far as we were concerned, the setback in time it caused us gained him no advantage after all, for we passed his schooner early in the northward race and enjoyed a prosperous trade.

All this crossed my mind as I entered the house and learned the full situation—that Karoff, while formerly a bitter enemy of the Reds, had completely turned his coat, and was now Red Governor of Northeast Siberia. He was, moreover, as I discovered from other sources, the wealthiest man in the trading game. Little sympathy would the *Iskum* gain from him in her present plight!

Karoff met me cordially, giving no sign that he recognized me as a commercial enemy. He was exceedingly dark for a white man,—only among the Turks have I seen Caucasians any darker,—with brilliant brown eyes, and was a smooth, sociable talker.

Burgh had been there ahead of me, I surmised, though he was not then in evidence. I explained our mission to Karoff, asking such favor as he could extend to us in the circumstances. He was voluble and agreeable, but could not deal officially with me. He dispatched dog-teams to fetch from the ship our duly accredited secretary and trader, respectively, with whom he would transact all necessary business. Diem and Felkel arrived at the end of two hours, at which time I prepared to return to the boat, knowing I was not needed ashore. I asked Sunny Boy to take me out, and was surprised to have him tell me he could not until permission had been granted by the *natchalnik*. I returned to Karoff for this permission, but did not get it until I had made a strong plea on the ground that the safety of the *Iskum* demanded my presence aboard.

This was quite true. Before coming ashore I had studied the ice movement around us. The current was running parallel to the edge of the shore ice, and we were in a niche which was fairly protected for the time being. Large bergs, however, were constantly drifting past the boat, and a slight turn of the current, or an additional breaking of the shore ice, might easily have been fatal to her.

I was finally allowed to return, though in the company of two armed guards with dog-teams of their own. Luckily, the guards took a different route back to the boat than Sunny Boy chose, as he insisted he must stop at his home in Peek Village, two miles from Dezhneva. Here his stout, smiling young wife met us, welcoming us into their igloo and bringing forward a large pot of raw walrus meat and seal blubber. My host selected the biggest hunk of walrus in the mess, the odor of which was anything but appetizing, closed his teeth over a large portion of it, and slashed it off between lips and grimy fingers. He then jabbed the point of his knife into a cube of seal blubber, which he tossed into his mouth as a chaser for the walrus. Extending both pot and knife to me, he politely asked me to par-

take. The strenuous exercise of the day had made me hungry, but not hungry enough for this. With the politest excuses I could muster I declined the food, in turn offering Sunny Boy a plug of tobacco. He completed his meal, at the end of which he ordered his wife—using most of the vivid cuss-words he had picked up during his whaling days—to bring him a napkin. Smiling with pride at his proficiency in English, she walked out of the igloo in rather a stately manner, returning with a handful of dry grass she had pulled up from a spot bare of snow. Sunny Boy gravely wiped his greasy mouth and fingers on the grass, and then proceeded to his real business in bringing me to his home. He brought out for my inspection a dozen luxurious white fox furs—pelts of the finest quality, even to an untrained eye—with long guard-hairs and large fluffy tails.

"Cannot trade them," he said.

Then his feelings overcame him. He let out his entire accumulation of sailor-profanity, jumped six feet straight up, with his heels together, as only an Eskimo can jump, and spat out angrily: "Russians!"

He was the most active Siberian Eskimo I have ever seen. His energy was like that of the American Eskimos of King Island, sixty miles off Nome, some of whom I watched one summer when they were over on the mainland entertaining tourists with their acrobatic and aquatic stunts. One of these had jumped up and kicked a ball with both the toes of his mukluks, though the ball was suspended so high I could barely

touch it by stretching up my arm, and I am a man of good average height. Sunny Boy was the only Siberian native I had seen who could come near that. His head went well up into the fourteen-foot peak of the igloo.

I sympathized with his outburst. I too could trade if it were not for the Russians, but as things were, his beautiful white foxes were not for me.

Diem and Felkel remained ashore overnight, returning to the ship, accompanied by Burgh, the next morning. The two guards who had kept watch on me then went back to the village, but not until I had heard stories from them about events accompanying the revolution that did not make me happy. I hoped against hope that something good might come of the conference on shore, but the *Iskum's* super-cargo and purser came aboard in a downcast mood.

When I had heard their report, I joined in their sadness. Our voyage was a failure. The company was ruined. We were here in Siberia, first on the ground, and yet could do no trading. We were not even to be allowed to call at our own trading-post where the friendly Mr. Parsons held forth, at Seniavine. Our orders were to proceed to Anadir in quest of a trading-permit. *En route* there, we might trade with the natives if we took Burgh along to supervise us, but if we touched in an American port before reaching Anadir, the company's property would be confiscated by the Russians. Diem, Felkel, and I discussed the situation thoroughly,

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finally deciding to make Anadir, but go by way of Gambell, on Saint Lawrence Island, which lies just outside the Gulf of Anadir, and leave there letters to the coast-guard cutter *Bear*, informing her officers that we were in doubt as to our safety. It was Burgh who had issued the order for us to avoid United States ports, his manner conveying the impression that he meant to be obeyed. We were taking him with us again, but we carefully made no promises on the point in question.

Our crew was augmented by one as we steamed away from East Cape. The day before, our chief engineer had been surprised to hear some one in a skin boat calling out to him as he appeared on the *Iskum's* deck, "Hullo, Jumbo!" The speaker proved to be a halfbreed Eskimo by the name of Allen, an intelligent, hard-working fellow about twenty-five years old, slight of build, and with a stiff right knee, who seemed, in my opinion, wholly unfitted to Eskimo conditions of life. We had him on board, where he showed himself keenly appreciative of our company, to all intents and purposes a white man, in every way adaptable to white customs. He had come to know Jumbo, we learned, at Tacoma, when he was a member of the crew of the trading-schooner *Kamchatka*, owned by the Svensen Company. As he was keen to get employment with us, we took him on as a seaman and interpreter.

BURGH made himself agreeable as a passenger when we began retracing our course to Gambell, acting the good fellow, sociable and entertaining. When the ice closed in around us, as it did at times, preventing any headway, we would set one man to watch its movement from the crow's-nest, while the rest of us drove away dull care with a friendly game of penny-ante poker. Burgh readily joined in, proving jolly company. We all enjoyed the diversion, for that matter. We also learned a good deal of our guest's life-history, for he began to talk as if he had been looking for years for some one in whom he could confide. He said he was of the middle class in Russia, when classes existed, and was fairly well educated; had been a Russian consular attaché in San Francisco, and had gone from there to the German Front in 1914. He had been wounded and taken prisoner, and had scars still showing on his right leg, his injury further leaving him with a slight limp. After a year in a prison-camp under miserable, starvation conditions, he had made his escape. He then took an active part in the extreme radical wing of the revolution in his own country, subsequently marching from Petrograd to Vladivostok, and dog-teaming over the deep snows of Northeast Siberia, from Vladivostok to East Cape, all in the service of the Bolshevik Government. He whiled away many a slow hour for us with tales of his varied experiences.

Twice our ship was frozen in, but the currents being active so near the Bering Straits, they soon broke up the moving, close-packed ice, and opened up leads for us again. Within a week we were at Gambell. Burgh made no complaint at our stopping here, rather to our surprise. On the contrary, he kept his jovial attitude toward all of us. We on our part responded to his friendliness, partly because his personality and his entertaining

conversation had made him a good traveling companion, and partly because we thought for us to be on good terms with him would prove profitable in our trading at Anadir. We thought we were allowing him to travel on our ship with us; we were later to learn that we were in reality his captives all the time.

GOING ashore at Gambell, Mr. Diem, in his capacity as secretary, left letters as we had planned, telling of the uncertain conditions under which we were traveling, and asking the *Bear* to come to our assistance in case we did not show up by the latter part of July.

What a sense of security it gave us just to know there was such a ship on these seas as the *Bear*,—the representative of United States authority, the policeman of the Arctic,—who for over three decades had patrolled these northern shores, rescuing endangered American citizens, administering justice in out-of-the-way places, and performing errands of mercy it would take a book to describe! Her services rendered during the Alaskan gold-rush alone have made a volume of history. Merely to let her commander know we were on our way to the Siberian port under conditions which left our security open to question gave us a feeling of friendly protection. We were sailing under the Stars and Stripes, and wherever we went, we were still a little part of the United States, clearance-papers or no clearance-papers. As long as we were aboard this ship and under this flag, we were fully entitled to the care of our home Government.

Personally, however, I inclined to give up the Anadir trip and go on to Nome from here, letting Burgh catch transportation on some other boat for the rest of his journey. The more I thought of it, the more certain it seemed to me that the Bolshevik government had decided on some measure which would be anything but beneficial to the *Iskum*, her owners, and her crew. Karoff had it in his power to do us much harm if he really was unfriendly, and I questioned the wisdom of carrying out his orders.

Burgh's assurances on this point, however, influenced us favorably. He said our trade permit would undoubtedly be forthcoming when we applied for it at Anadir, and that he was also quite sure we could dispose of most of our goods there, particularly if we arrived ahead of any of the other boats. He advised us further that the Soviet Government was in need of just such stores as we were carrying, and would be more than likely to buy out the cargo.

SUCH a prospect could not help but tempt us. We figured that in case we sold out our present stock at the one port, we could go on to Nome, lay in the supplies necessary for our own trading-stations, deliver these, and collect the furs we knew would be waiting for us at each place, and by thus handling a double cargo make a real killing for the summer. Against my plain business instinct, however, my experience of the previous year with the deceit and double dealing of Russian traders and officials still warned me to be careful. Despite our friend Burgh's upright and honest appearance, I did not wholly trust his promises. He had confirmed the

suspicion which had formed in my mind at our first meeting, that he was an advance guard for the Red Government; he was a man of power under that Government now. I could not but praise the wisdom of the powers that chose him, as I doubt whether a better man for the purpose could have been found. In fact, he seemed to me then much too good to be detailed to such a cold, remote, difficult, and relatively unimportant region. Why did the Reds bother with it? Why did they not let the Eskimo and the Chutchki, whose requirements were trifling, go on transacting their little deals with the various competing small traders? What was the Bolshevik Government driving at in taking its present adverse attitude? It surely was not aiming to keep the small-trader out of Siberia either for the benefit of the trader himself or of the native.

I learned the answer to these questions later on, for I finally fell in with the wishes of Diem and Felkel and the encouragements of Burgh, and headed the *Iskum* for Anadir; I learned that the Eskimo was getting too wise to suit the Reds. But while I was acquiring this knowledge, I was destined to learn a good deal more about the Reds themselves than I would have elected to know if given an open choice!

CHAPTER IV

ONCE having made up my mind to go, a determination to get to Anadir first of all the traders took hold of me like a passion. We knew that the ice in the gulf rarely cleared until the second or third week in July, although an occasional early year afforded the exception to the rule. But we could do nothing where we were, while by starting at once on our way, we would be able to stand ready to enter the bay at the first favorable moment.

Accordingly, we nosed the *Iskum* into a narrow lead along the coast off Cape Chukotski on the twelfth of June, a day when the weather was fine and clear, with the sea perfectly smooth. The ice had broken along the shore, leaving a strip from one to six miles wide still attached to the coast. We ran along the lead to the westward, the scattered ice-pack lying within a mile or two to the south, and the strip of ice clinging the shore to the north along the rugged coast of the Chukotski peninsula. Should the wind blow from the north, the ice-pack would drift south, leaving us in clear water, but an air-current from the south would make us watch our chances. In the latter case, if we were so fortunate as to get into a niche and so avoid the tremendous pressure of the pack hundreds of miles in extent, all would be well. But if the *Iskum* ever got caught between the pack and the shore-ice, she would be firewood in less time than it takes to tell. Everyone aboard was fully aware of this.

But it stayed calm; neither the wind from the north, for which we hoped, started blowing, nor the one from the south, which we dreaded. We had only ice—ever-lingering ice. Sometimes we had to work our way through this by ramming and pushing the floes before us, while again the lead opened to a width of three miles—but the solid pack remained all ways in sight to the southward.

Skirting the shore as we did, we often saw huts along the way, and stopped in the hope of trade. The natives usually came down to the edge of the ice to meet us, but we succeeded in making few deals. We could not account for this at the time, for we knew we had what they wanted. We soon observed, however, that it was only when Supervisor Burgh was out of sight and hearing that a native would talk business at all. Then one or another would bring out a fur and dicker with Felkel on the exchange. If Burgh hove in sight during the transaction, the fur promptly disappeared again inside the parka of the owner, who would turn around and walk away. Felkel managed to secure a few beautiful pelts, at that, so reviving our hopes of success for the expedition.

One hundred thirty miles west of Saint Lawrence Island, we touched at Cape Berling, on the south shore of the western limit of the Siberian mainland. Here we found a large, businesslike Eskimo village, with a few wooden houses standing among the usual skin huts. My attention was mainly attracted by the large skin boats in evidence, some of them fifty feet in length. I learned that no nails are used in the making of these, the frames being lashed together with narrow strips of rawhide. Large walrus skins are then stretched outside the frames, the edges turned over the gunwale and laced to the frame inside the boat. A nice bit of engineering skill is indicated by a boat built after this fashion.

Prosperous though the village seemed, we were again unsuccessful at trading, and we again moved along the narrow lead, Burgh encouraging us with prophecies of how well we were going to do at Anadir. We made another trade attempt at Rudder Bay, meeting another disappointment, after which we nosed on along Meechken Spit.

This narrow gravel spit, fifty miles long, is separated from the mainland by a shallow lagoon. Huts appeared inland, indicating the presence of deer-men, as those natives who subsist on the flesh of reindeer are called, to distinguish them from the fish-eating Eskimos. Mr. Diem and I decided to cross the lagoon on the ice and see if we could not scare up a little trade here. We were received most hospitably by the hardy inhabitants, the lady of one igloo serving us tea and dried deer-fat. The latter is considered a wonderful delicacy by these Chuckchis, being offered only to guests they wish to honor highly. We were much pleased by the friendliness of our reception, but as before were unable either to trade or to learn the reason why we failed. Unless conditions changed materially after our arrival in Anadir, we realized we were going to "fawncy Siberia" much less than we had anticipated back in Vancouver.

IN the small Eskimo village located at Cape Meechken we found the population apparently in hard straits, and went the length of giving them the food and clothing they were unable to buy. A few more such relief expeditions, and we would have nothing to trade when our chance came. Farther on, we entered Holy Cross Bay, but were prevented from landing by solid ice for ten miles between us and the shore. This region lies just below the Arctic Cir-

cle. From here our course turned southward, along the west shore of the Gulf of Anadir, where our troubles began to multiply, our progress becoming only a series of narrow escapes.

UP as far as Holy Cross Bay the coastline had been about west-northwest and east-southeast, the tidal currents setting along the coast causing the ice to drift in a direction parallel to it, in that way holding the lead along the shore comparatively free from ice. From Holy Cross Bay toward Russian Spit, the coastline for thirty miles is nearly north and south, while for the remaining sixty miles it is southwest and northeast. At flood-tide the current sets directly toward the coastline until it reaches the edge of the shore-ice, where it turns into whirlpools of fairly gigantic dimensions, causing the ice-floes to mill around, bumping and shoving one another.

One can see plainly that under these conditions the broken-up ice drifts back up against the shore-ice on the flood-tide, while on the ebb it drifts out to sea. We found that it does not go very far out to sea, however. We began to recognize certain floes on their return trips, and the boys made a game of picking them out, naming them according to their peculiar shapes and characteristics, such as "Black Anna," which was discolored from walrus wallows, "Angel Gabriel," a berg with a trumpet-shape, and the like. And we also played a game of "Dodge 'em" in trying to negotiate a passage. It was possible to make some headway at ebb-tide, when the floes drifted out of the way, but on the flood we were in constant danger of being crushed. Finding a position which seemed comparatively safe, I stayed for two days, watching the ice go in and out. I had determined not to enter this lead until the floes stopped coming up against the shore-ice. Stationed aloft in my snug crow's-nest, with nothing but my own thoughts for company as I watched the movement of the cold gray waters around the ship, with the early Northern sun at times glittering sharply on the floating ice, but more often with the dull gray of a heavy sky above me, I recalled the premonitions of evil which had first come to my mind with the description of my crow's-nest by the fisherman's child at Tacoma. Thus far, our voyage had been an experience of bafflement and keen disappointment. Into what further grief, or even mortal danger, might we be moving? Should we go on, or try to beat it back to safety while we were still all alive and active?

For two days I mulled these questions over in my mind, haunted by a sense of impending peril. Then, on the third day, I found the *Iskum* completely surrounded by ice, with a narrow lead southward and the tide ebbing.

It was as if the elements themselves were commanding me to go on. For six hours we ran a zigzag course, pushing and ramming the ice. Then we were brought to a dead stop. The bergs were milling around the *Iskum* with a steady, grinding movement, while she milled around with them. At last she loosed from the pack—a kick ahead, a kick astern, hard to port, and hard to starboard. All became hustle and bustle aboard, the crew pushing with pike-poles as the bergs crowded

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of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, published monthly at Dayton, Ohio, for October, 1930.

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close. I, up aloft, watching all around the hull of the little schooner, could see some of the bergs as far down as their lower edges, and made every effort to keep the ship's nose toward the clear. The perfect coöperation given by my entire crew, including Burgh and little lame Allen, is a source of pleasure and satisfaction to me even now. When wedged in where our main engine was insufficient to loose us, some one would leap out on the ice with a bow-line or a stern-line and make it fast to a sharp point, while some one aboard would give a few turns on our husky windlass. This outside leverage often served to remove us from pressing danger.

For six hours we continued the battle, with all our resources taxed to the utmost. Then the ice-pack loosened up. The *Iskum* was once more in the clear.

OUR location was certainly not safe, however, and we could only look for something better farther on. Determining to make all possible progress on this ebb, I ordered full speed ahead. At first the lead remained clear, but soon a light slush appeared on the surface of the water where the big bergs had been. Evidently the surface was not affected by the ebbing tide, the current drawing out far below taking the bergs with large displacement, but leaving the light loose fragments. This slush thickened as we went on. The ice-pack was now out of sight, but we moved in a sea of slush extending as far as my telescope could carry.

I reflected that anything so light and thin as this could not hurt the *Iskum*, and decided to drive her in as far as the engine could push her. On we went, our speed slowing down to six, four, two, and one, until movement was scarcely noticeable. The *Iskum* was held as in a bowl of thick mush.

"She's safe here," I announced to the crew. "When the pack comes in, it will only jam the slush tight around us, and when the tide turns again, the ebb will carry enough of it away to open up a lead and leave us free to travel."

With the flooding tide the slush grew thicker and still thicker. Now a whirlpool would catch it and swing it in a circle. The ship, packed at the center, seemed to be dancing a waltz. But she was easy. She was packed evenly on all sides, and the slush did not grind against her. It was a phenomenal situation.

Then on the eastern horizon the ice-pack loomed in view, coming at a steady gait like an advancing army, nearer—nearer—nearer. The slush began to press tight around us. Whatever might come now, the *Iskum* was at its mercy.

Watching with my glasses, I could see the higher bergs moving ahead of the flat ice. They were winning the race, plowing their way through the slush like steel shares in mellow soil, cutting wide furrows as they moved. How did this strange thing come about? At last I explained it to my satisfaction. The flood-current, being stronger below than on the surface of the water, was making the deep-set bergs move in against the opposition of the slush, while the flat surface-ice with nothing to catch the deeper sweep could

move only with the top-water, held back further by the slush.

The bergs came nearer. Soon a high one which left a wide furrow of clear water in its wake rode alongside the *Iskum*, drawing so near that it grazed the ship's iron-bark, while her fastenings groaned and creaked. A closer passage would have ruined us, immovable as we were in the soft ice. Then the berg passed, followed by a long breath of relief from us on the ship. Full speed ahead now, into the clear path behind the moving ice-monster—this at all cost! Ramming her bow fairly up on the berg, and holding her engine at full speed, I attempted to keep the *Iskum* moving faster than the other oncoming bergs, and to sheer aside the ice behind the stern with the propeller stream.

For several hours this maneuver proved successful, although more bergs kept moving in behind us. But at last our pathfinder bumped against the shore-ice. Before I could say "shoot" a good-sized berg at our stern, moving with considerable momentum, in turn bumped us.

Crash!

"Hard to port!" sounded my call.

"Steering-gear out of order," came the answer from the pilot-house.

The tide had turned. The pack was moving out.

"Get a line on the shore-ice!" I shouted.

As I noted a moment of hesitation, I shinned down the back stay, snatched the end of the line, and jumped from the boat onto the nearest berg. Only small pieces of ice occupied the water around the ship, so that I had to leap from one to another in order to gain the shore-strip. If an official measurer had been present, I have not the least doubt he would have credited me with establishing the world's record in the broad jump. My speed and energy had desperation as their motive, for to drift out to sea with only a broken steering-gear between us and the weight and pull of the tide-drawn ice-pack would have been no less than certain tragedy. I reached the firm shore-ice, and in a moment more had the line biting into a suitable crag. The crew hauled the ship up to safety in a moment more, and we began to investigate the extent of our damages. Alex Nicholson reported no sign of leaks, to my intense relief, but found the quadrant broken and the rudder bent.

THEN it was that Jumbo took the center-stage. Bringing his little forge on deck, he went to work, assuring me that the quadrant was as good as mended already. The rudder proved not to be beyond use, although bent a bit out of line. Taking over as material to work with the pilot-house control-gear which we never used, Jumbo had within four hours contrived a new, workable quadrant.

"Good enough!" I said. "But what is going to keep it solid on the rudder-post?"

In answer, he put a pot of babbitting metal to melt. Stuffing soap and paper at the underside of the quadrant where its crude hole fitted around the rudder-post, he poured the hole full of the hot metal. The rudder worked perfectly under this arrangement. We were now ready for our next battle with the ice.

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CHILDREN OF THE RANGE

(Continued from page 68)

They were kind to him—very kind. They had all been his friends, and still seemed to be. At his suggestion, they liberated Mary's horse and saddled one of his own for him, swearing not to mention the roan to anyone. And they would not, for several hours—until some one got engrossed in telling the story of the man-hunt, and forgot himself!

But they meant well. When the others returned, old Pat, without being asked, removed the handcuffs, and merely tied his feet to his stirrups and removed his spurs and quirt.

Dan rode in the lead, with Pat and Ed on either side of him and the others strung out carelessly behind. As they rode along a sudden thought occurred to Ed.

"What," he grunted, "would the sheriff say if he knew about Mary givin' him her horse? Bet he'll throw a fit!"

Old Pat shook his head.

"I—I don't know. Likely he'll think all the more o' her for stickin' in a pinch; he's an old-time cowboy, an' has an old-time cowboy's way of lookin' at things."

"But, good Lord! It'll cause a lot of talk, especially if Dan—"

Ed stopped short and bit his lip. He had almost said *hanged*. The words seemed to beat through Dan's brain. And if he were not hanged, a life sentence. That was far worse. With hanging, it would soon be over. But jail for life—penned behind gray stone walls. Never again to see little calves frisking over the hillsides, never again to feel the swing and sway of a bucking horse between his knees. Day after day, year after year, those bleak stone walls around him. . . .

Hazily he saw a big dusty car in front of the court-house. It was the sheriff's—it was always dusty. So Ellis was back from Prescott with Ernie Dalton. That is, unless Ernie had died of his wounds. No one could get away from the law, especially when it was represented by old Martin Ellis.

Dan's feet were untied, and he was led up the steps, two men holding his arms. Some one was hurrying down the sidewalk. Mary!

And then he was in the sheriff's office, with old Martin Ellis sitting across from him at his battered, littered desk. How businesslike, merciless, the old man looked. He was no longer Ellis the cattleman, Dan Carson's friend; he was the sheriff, and nothing else.

"So you brought him in, boys? Good work! We can put him in Cell Fourteen for the present."

Turning to Dan, Ellis asked coldly:

"What did you do with Mary's horse?"

"I—I don't know what you mean," Dan lied.

And then he heard Mary's voice: "Dan, I told him."

"Why—I turned him loose to go home. He's likely there by this time."

"I see."

Sheriff Ellis turned to glare at his daughter, but something else shone out through the glare. Was it pride in her? There was a daughter of the range for you! A fitting child for a man who had always been ready to "look anyone in the eye and tell him to go to hell!" He motioned to his deputies:

"Take him an' lock him up, boys."

Old Pat Nally paused to ask him:

"Did you bring Ernie Dalton back, or was he dead?"

"He was dead when I got there—an' besides, it wasn't Ernie at all. I have letters here sayin' that they've arrested two more Ernies—one in Phoenix and one in New Mexico."

Then he stood up, a tall, bony figure behind his battered desk. He pointed a weatherbeaten finger accusingly at Dan:

"You're a good one, you are! Gettin' Mary all upset this way! Better get on yore horse an' ride out an' help her find that roan before he gits in a bed of loco!"

"But—but—"

Dan's jaw dropped. Was the old man mad? But Martin Ellis' stony face suddenly cracked in a grin, little wrinkles gathering around his keen old eyes.

"Son," he said, "that was Ernie Dalton you killed—an' I jest want to see Charley Richards' face when he pays you that ten thousand!"

THE FLIGHT OF THE DOOMED

(Continued from page 37)

"While we were at lunch that double-crossing German skunk was using your wireless, General!" groaned Colonel Ripley. "I thought you were a trifle over-trustful, leaving him here alone while we ate."

"That's all right, Rip," said the Chief, a look of triumph gleaming for a second in his eyes. "I had Ferguson upstairs copying his message as he sent it. I knew all about Number Sixteen. He did exactly what I expected him to."

The tall Colonel turned bewildered eyes from the General to me.

"And you let him go!" he gasped. "He would have sacrificed Captain Steele the moment he landed—and he doubtless had valuable information for the enemy—"

"Not as valuable as you fear, Ripley," interrupted General Wade with a grin.

"He and his bag were stuffed with quite misleading information. It worked perfectly. They'll continue to concentrate at Montfaucon now, instead of St. Mihiel, or I miss my guess. We'll start the St. Mihiel show immediately. Amazing luck for that agent to die as he did! Stellings had no chance to talk with him, and they'll swallow the bait—hook, line and sinker."

And the General smiled genially at his stunned subordinate.

"But, sir—we put Captain Steele's neck right into the noose—" stammered Colonel Ripley.

The General's smile faded.

"His neck is hardly equivalent to an entire American division," he retorted grimly. He turned majestically toward me.

"That is all, Captain. Thank you; I shall not forget it."

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THE PLATINUM WAR

(Continued from page 43)

a squawking gabble of joy presently burst out from both *tongs* as the Celestial mind finished considering Steve's proposition. The psychology behind it seemed to be that, if Steve divided the combined loot, every man would get far more than if their own China-captains did it. That final division in China would be a poor moiety for each humble coolie and a fat rake-off for the leaders of the respective *tongs*. But if their white bosses did it—

"Yes?" said Steve, grabbing at the enthusiasm. "All right! It's a present from the Kumpanie, you sabby? Next time you make loot-cache you all go dead—finish all-same one pig!" He pointed warningly at Dain Bulieng and his men, and frowned some more. "Now go chop-chop, everybody, and put out fire," he ordered with a final wave of the hand.

Keyte exploded with vast chortlings as Steve's men dropped everything to obey him and the washer *tong* hastened to follow suit. "My very best, dear old chap!" he beamed on Steve with fervor. "Give in a little and win all, what? You handled 'em jolly keen—my word, you did! Most

irregular, what? But we can afford to give 'em their pickings this time."

"We got off cheap," said Steve with a meaning glance at Dain Bulieng's police force, who stood disappointed and uncertain, watching the two *tongs* at work. "Better give those birds something to do, hadn't we?"

"Right. I say, Chief!" Keyte raised his voice to call him over. "You'll stop with us, please. Show of force, when we make the division that the Tuan told them about, what? You'll be needed, Chief!"

THAT satisfied them, partly. They got a grand feast out of it that noon. And they were lined up on the management veranda when each coolie was passed through singly to receive his share of the combined caches of both *tongs*. That from the bamboo cache had been meticulously picked up and turned in, to the last bit of platinum. The Yee Hop Songs had seen to that, since all their loot was to be divided likewise! Steve had meanwhile recovered the bags from Kong Beng. Weighed out into two hundred

lots, each coolie received about two ounces of platinum as a "present" from the company—backsheesh, as it were—and was warned that his next attempt at pilfering the Corporation's ore would send him headless back to China. It was worth it, Keyte agreed with Steve, to avoid a bloody war and a Dyak massacre. Poor devils, they got little enough anyhow, coolie wages being what they were!

As for the two China-captains, they were let to stew for two whole days in Kong Beng under the influence of the Hindoo Elder Gods and that solemn moving shaft of sunlight. It was a chastened pair that was led out of there and allowed to take command of their *tongs* again, to find the war over and themselves presented with just two ounces of platinum by the grace of the Kumpanie. No fight, no melodrama, no massacre; but that is the way things are managed in this workaday world if you want to keep the platinum coming.

Keyte saw to it later that the Corporation awarded Steve a gold watch for their Chief Engineer's work that day!

THE MAN ON THE IRON GRAY

(Continued from page 108)

"If she jumps, wet your saddle-blankets and cover the granary, and watch out for the stack!"

For once the genius of man was working with the forces of Nature. When it seemed that the rolling flames would overwhelm the backfire and rush onto the buildings and stack, a sudden change came over the scene. The heated air from the backfire caused a draft which deflected the wind up toward the clouds. Moment by moment the backfire had become more powerful until, just as the two fires were about to meet, the space between was turned into a giant chimney, the air from both directions rushing toward the center.

In another instant it was over: The whole line of backfire sprang into life and itself became a rolling wall of flame, actually leaping forward to the assault. Then the fires met and a blast of heat almost shriveled the watchers in their tracks; a blinding light spread from the inferno of flame; a mighty crackling voice filled the valley; the flames leaped higher yet into the air—but there was no more

fuel below, and they quickly sank again, to glow, to flicker, and to die. . . .

When the worst of the smoke had passed, Lloyd Conroy got to his feet and helped his wife, to hers. The awful period of anxiety had passed, leaving them limp and weak. A few minutes before they had thought themselves worse than paupers—but now realized that they had lost nothing save a single stack of hay.

The mounted man, where was he? Conroy turned to see him, still mounted, standing behind them.

By the light of the burning hay they could see his features plainly. He was a big man, a fine-looking man with gray hair and a close-clipped mustache, and his voice, when he spoke, held a combined ring of congratulation and of friendliness:

"Hello, Conroy! We got here just in time, didn't we?"

He seemed to take it for granted that they knew who he was, for he continued without a pause: "Sorry I can't stop, but there are other newcomers up on the big flat and they may need help as bad as

you did; but I wanted to say that Molly—Molly's my wife—We've been gone most of the summer, but we'll be over some day soon for a genuine visit. Sorry we couldn't show up before."

CONROY tried to speak, but his voice choked; a man does not lose all and gain all in a minute, and yet retain his self-possession. Helen tried to make up for her husband's apparent lack of gratitude; but the effort brought only tears, and sobbing, she hid her face.

"That's all right," said the big man. "I know doggone' well how you feel. Better go to bed and get a little rest. I'll see you again in a day or two. You're safe now, anyway; you've got a good firebreak." Then he was gone, moving across to the eastern bluffs.

As Conroy led his wife toward the house, Helen queried: "Who do you suppose he is, Lloyd?"

"I don't suppose—I know," replied Lloyd. "He is that murderous old thief Bill Daily—the man on the iron-gray!"

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